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Decision making processes of student affairs professionals : an analysis of ethical considerations identified through focus group discussions.

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DECISION MAKING PROCESSES OF STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS: AN ANALYSIS OF ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IDENTIFIED THROUGH FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

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This study uses focus group discussions as a means for understanding the role of ethics in the decision making processes of student affairs professionals. A second purpose of the study is to consider the method of the focus group discussion itself as a means to enable dialogue and conversation among student affairs professionals about ethical issues.

The problem is explored through four research questions:

1) Do ethical considerations enter into the decision making processes utilized by student affairs professionals?

2) How do actual decision making processes as described by the student affairs professionals relate to prescriptions for ethical decision making in the literature?

3) To what extent is an ethic of caring exhibited?

4) Does the focus group forum itself contribute to developing a campus environment which promotes dialogue on ethical decision making?

In this study, 26 staff at the University of Southern Maine participated in three focus group discussions. The participants were grouped according to position level: entry-level, mid-level, and director level. The discussion topics designed for the moderator's outline included two hypothetical case situations, as well as opportunities to discuss real work situations. Data were gathered from the transcription of the audio tapes of the discussions, and analyzed in relation to the research questions. Data specific to research question four were also gathered from responses to a follow-up questionnaire administered one month after the focus group interviews.

The findings suggest that ethical considerations do enter into the decision making processes of the student affairs staff. The focus group discussions were shown to be a valuable intervention for a campus. The method can help produce an environment which is conducive to dialogue on important matters and in which considerations of ethics are perceived as valuable. Additional findings suggest that organizational considerations are an important part of the decision making processes of the student affairs participants. Regularized focus group discussion among student affairs staff can serve to promote such dialogue in the larger campus community, and therefore is an important step towards the development of an appropriate institutional environment for ethical decision making.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

"Every college and university, public or private, church related or not, is in the business of shaping human lives" (Chickering, 1981, p. 10). This shaping of human lives occurs as a result of institutional decision making. Because "resolutions to most administrative problems are not right or wrong, but wise or unwise" (Plante, 1987, p. x), administrators in higher education must have a foundation from which to develop "wise" decision making practices.

Since the early 1980's, it has been recognized as important for student affairs professionals to consider ethics as an emerging issue in the field (Canon & Brown, 1985; Delworth & Seeman, 1984; Fried, 1988; Kitchener, 1985; Winston & Dagley, 1985). Because they are responsible for making decisions which affect people's lives, student affairs professionals confront ethical issues daily. These ethical dilemmas occur within every area of their professional responsibilities: in encounters with individual students and student organizations, in interactions with colleagues, supervisors, faculty, and external constituencies; and in day-to-day activities to carry out administrative responsibilities and implement policies (Canon, 1985).

In the student affairs area, ethical issues are usually considered through ethical decision making models or through codes of ethics. Kitchener (1985), a student affairs scholar, is often cited by other student affairs professionals for her ethical decision making model. There are a number of ethical decision making models designed by scholars outside of the field of student affairs which are also used to assist student affairs professionals in making decisions (Blanchard & Peale, 1988; Drucker, 1981; Erikson, 1963; Jones, 1982; Kerr, 1988; Nash, 1981; Steinem, 1987).

Much recent literature on ethics has been concerned with codes of ethics. The literature from the business world as well as within the educational realm both advocates and opposes the development and use of codes of ethics (Behrman, 1981; Bowman, 1980; Callahan, 1982; Churchill, 1982; Genfan, 1987; Hoffman, 1986; Jones, 1982; Modic, 1987; Nash, 1981; Pastin, 1986; Weber, 1981). The predominant focus in the literature, however, has been on ways to measure behavior against codes of ethics, rather than on means for developing and supporting ethical decision making and behavior. This has supported a widespread, popular assumption that having a facility with ethical jargon is equal to being ethical.

Ethical decision making, whether facilitated by models or codes, has traditionally been considered a matter of individual behavior, of persons acting alone. This reflects wide-spread beliefs regarding ethics, which Canon and Brown have identified as "ethical myths," such as "people are ethical or they are not" and the fear that "personal ethical perfection is prerequisite to any serious consideration of ethics" (1985, p. 82, p. 84). More recently, however, there has been some recognition of the importance of group processes in decision making. Although a decision making model proposed by Nash (1981) consists of twelve questions to assist *individuals* in making business decisions, Nash advocates the use of her model by *groups*, because it would mean talking as a group about a subject traditionally seen as private. Smith advocates the process of participatory discussion in higher education, and has observed that "careful conversation can...offer some sense of a common, public discourse amidst the diversity of interest and roles" (1985, p. 16).

There are those who argue that the group discussion process of developing a code of ethics is more important than the utilization of the code itself (Berhman, 1981; Callahan, 1982; Canon & Brown, 1985; Jones, 1982). Recently, this perspective was articulated quite clearly by philosopher Steven M. Cahn when he stated in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*: "I'm not necessarily calling for a code of ethics. I'm calling for some discussion" (Magner, 1989, p. A11). Jones (1982) agrees with this perspective: "while creeds and codes have a place, the *process of intercommunication* is a more significant and effective way to encourage ethical reflection" (p. 107, emphasis added).

The emphasis on group discussion and intercommunication is seen as particularly important for student affairs professionals. Fried (1988) suggests that student affairs staff can promote a campus environment where questions are asked and *dialogue* ensues. She offers specific suggestions for student affairs professionals: modeling behavior, asking questions, promoting dialogue, and disclosing perspectives and beliefs. Waters (1988) also encourages interaction, which he identifies as "good conversation:" dialogue among two or more managers who endeavor to do the best job possible in a conflicted situation.

> Armed more with questions...than with unalterable positions, the participants in good conversation experience their interaction more as problem solving guided by values of inquiry and cooperation than as debate guided by values of strategy and competition (Waters, 1988, p. 189).

Srivastva (1988) also cautions against entering into debate, and calls for engagement in dialogue which would expand participants' perspectives. Srivastva and Barrett (1988) propose that through dialogue and support for diversity and human development, the "relational life" of an organization is strengthened. To focus on the relational life of an organization is to move towards integrity:

> Integrity can only be understood as an interactive event, a transformative process that becomes visible in those moments when an individual steps out of a self-oriented mode of existence and makes an effort to attend to the other's development. Executive integrity is based on a recognition of the relational nature of organizational existence and is embodied, therefore, in any deliberate attempt to nourish, strengthen, or enhance the delicate relational life of the whole system. (Srivastva & Barrett, 1988, p. 26).

Statement of the Problem

The literature on ethics, especially that which focuses on the development of codes of ethics and models of decision making, has been useful for student affairs professionals. For the most part, however, the literature contains normative prescriptions for behavior. It works "from the outside in." There has been little effort to work "from the inside out," utilizing the voices of the student affairs professionals themselves, to understand how ethical considerations figure into their own decision making processes. In addition, there has been little effort in the student affairs field to create an interactive process in which student affairs professionals can attend to one another as they discuss and work together to explore ethical decision making.

Cahn (1989), Fried (1988), Smith (1985), and Waters (1988) have proposed in the literature that group dialogue among professionals would be effective in facilitating and supporting ethical decision making.

Srivastva (1988) and Srivastva and Barrett (1988) call for group dialogue as well, and see it as a transformative process for the individual and for the whole system. The literature contains no discussion, however, of any specific efforts to engage student affairs professionals in such dialogue. There is no evidence from the field about *how* student affairs professionals consider ethics as they go about making decisions that affect the lives of students. What is needed is a better understanding of how individuals consider ethics as they make decisions, and how student affairs professionals working *together* bring ethical considerations into their work. The problem then is to achieve a better understanding "from the inside out" of ethical decision making for student affairs professionals.

The intent of this study is to use focus group discussions as a means for understanding the role of ethics in the decision making processes of student affairs professionals. A second purpose is to consider the method of the focus group discussion itself as a means to enable dialogue and conversation among student affairs professionals about ethics. One assumption is that in sharing their own, subjective considerations, the student affairs professionals will describe ethical decision making, regardless of their fluency with "ethical jargon." A second assumption is that the focus group discussions will provide an interactive process which enables group sharing and support around ethical issues.

The problem is explored through four research questions:

1) Do ethical considerations enter into the decision making processes utilized by student affairs professionals?

2) How do actual decision making processes as described by the student affairs professionals relate to prescriptions for ethical decision making in the literature?

3) To what extent is an ethic of caring exhibited?

4) Does the focus group forum itself contribute to developing a campus environment which promotes dialogue on ethical decision making?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to our understanding of how ethical considerations are involved in decision making, since the focus group dialogue provides a means for understanding decision making processes. There is no prior research which utilizes a focus group methodology in gathering data on ethical considerations in decision making. As the baseline study, this research provides initial explorative information which will help other researchers conduct focused group research involving student affairs staff.

Limitations of the Study

Understanding behavior is always difficult, and to understand what is involved in decision making is inherently difficult. This study is limited in that it is dependent upon what the participants say; there is no external validation of behavior. A second limitation derives from the fact that the data collection method is the use of group discussions; therefore, participants' responses will be influenced by the direction of the group conversation.

The use of a qualitative research method produces another area of limitation; the focus group methodology provides insights and directions rather than quantitatively precise or absolute measures. As such, it can not be generalized, but should provide initial explorative information to assist research of this type. Because of the limited number of respondents involved, this research should be regarded as exploratory in nature.

Since focus groups are primarily used for market research, an additional limitation of the study is the first-time application of the method for research on professionals in student affairs. The only prior use of focus groups on college campuses is limited to the gathering of perceptions of students regarding their education (Bers, 1987; Barrows & Malaney, 1989).

Definition of Terms

A *focus group interview* is a qualitative research technique in which a small number of respondents (usually eight to ten) and a moderator participate in a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a specific area of interest (Krueger, 1988; Goldman & McDonald, 1987). Focus group participants influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion, but are not pressured to come to any consensus of opinion.

The *focus group moderator* for this study is the researcher. Thus, the same person designed the study and moderator's outline, conducted the focus groups, analyzed the discussion data, and prepared the written report.

Ethics is the study of moral behavior. In this study, ethics is discussed within two paradigms: an ethic of justice and an ethic of caring. An *ethic of justice* is ethical behavior which results from moral reasoning. Moral reasoning is marked by the application of universal principles and abstract laws; disputes are adjudicated impersonally, impartially and fairly (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986). An *ethic of caring* is ethical behavior born of a moral attitude. An ethic of caring requires an understanding of the context of the situation, and focuses on relationships and responsibilities (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984).

A *code of ethics* states the ideals of a profession, regulates the practices of its practitioners toward each other, and delineates their relationships with others (Callahan, 1982). A code of ethics commonly represents ethical principles on which members of an organization and/or profession can agree. Consequently, ethical statements usually represent minimal standards, because of the need for shared agreement (Canon & Brown, 1985).

A *student affairs professional* is a college or university employee who provides services which support a student's academic mission. These offices include Dean of Students, Admissions, Financial Aid, Housing and Residence Life, Student Activities, Disabled Student Services, Career Placement Services, Health Services, Orientation, Public Safety, Greek Life, and sometime include Academic Support Services and/or services for under-represented groups such as Women's Centers and Ethnic Minority Cultural Centers.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter II provides a review of the literature on ethics and ethical decision making. It includes a review of theoretical and applied ethics, a presentation of ethics from a justice paradigm and a caring paradigm, reviews of codes of ethics, current ethical decision making models, the concept of integrity, and a discussion of ethical decision making in higher education.

Chapter III describes the research design and method. Because there is a dearth of literature devoted to focus group research in higher education, general information is provided on this qualitative research method. Specifics of the research setting, research population, and instrumentation are also explained in Chapter III, as well as the procedures for data collection.

The findings are presented and analyzed in Chapter IV. First, an overview of each of the three focus group discussions is presented. Data from the discussions are then analyzed in relation to each of the research questions. In Chapter V, summary findings and recommendations for future research are presented.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The field of ethics is very broad, with an extensive literature. A full review of the literature is beyond the scope of this study. This chapter will focus on aspects from the domain of ethics which are related to ethical decision making: theoretical and applied ethics, justice and caring paradigms, codes of ethics, ethical decision making models, integrity, and ethical decision making in higher education. The literature on focus groups and other aspects related to the research method will be reviewed in Chapter III.

Ethics: Theoretical and Applied

Ethics, the study of moral behavior, can be categorized and utilized within two distinct approaches: theoretical and applied. Normally, ethics would be distinguished in three parts: descriptive ethics, metaethics, and applied ethics (Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences, 1980), but for the purpose of contrast in this review, descriptive ethics and metaethics are combined into theoretical ethics.

Theoretical perspectives on ethics are grounded in moral development. Ethicists begin from an *individual* manner of decision making, and theoretically question "what is right?" (DeMarco & Fox, 1986; Noddings, 1984).

> Historically, philosophers have sought to examine and defend ethical principles in order to guide action and enlighten moral judgements...The major difference between popular opinions on ethics and the theories of moral philosophers is that philosophers usually try to clarify their positions and demonstrate truth (DeMarco & Fox, 1986, p. 5).

Traditional theoretical ethics is primarily concerned with abstract, general principles. According to DeMarco and Fox (1986), within the theoretical arena are a number of schools of ethical theory, many of which seem to conflict. Analytical philosophers feel it is not their business to address practical issues. Emotivists say there is no such thing as moral truth. Intuitionists argue that moral truth cannot be discovered by reasoning. Relativists claim that morality is a matter of perspective--cultural or personal. Kant has argued that moral rules are established on the basis of universal applicability and respect for persons. Contemporary utilitarians argue that the values of *consequences* determine the rightness or wrongness of actions; whereas Thomists argue on the basis of *intentions*.

Because of the differences in perspectives between the various schools of ethical theory, many conclude that philosophy has little to offer in the way of practical concerns and solutions (DeMarco & Fox, 1986). In response, the "applied ethics" movement developed. "Applied ethics is moral inquiry directed to making actual choices in moral conflicts" (Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences, 1980, p. 15). Applied ethics isn't concerned with how to arrive at a perspective, it is concerned with the manner in which general ethical principles can be applied to a specific case, so that the end result will be an ethical decision. Applied ethics encompasses the process whereby practices are examined from a perspective of morality, and the justification of actions or the reasons for judgements may be questioned. To resolve questions, applied ethicists often advocate personal codes or socially accepted rules. If the rules are in question, moral principles are invoked, to justify the rules (DeMarco & Fox, 1986; Kitchener, 1985).

Many have challenged the use of applied ethics out of concern that applied ethics "presupposes the position of one or another school of philosophy and hence does not face up to the problem of opposing philosophical views" (DeMarco & Fox, 1986, p. 3). The inherent concern is that applied ethics is limited because it lacks the critical investigation of "the truth" of its foundations. Nevertheless, applied ethics is defended on the virtue of its principles:

> Principles of truth-telling, promise-keeping, or self-realization, for example, may be supported by virtually every theory, and they are also bases of agreement which can be used to guide action (DeMarco & Fox, 1986, p. 17).

Applied ethics is specifically directed toward the resolution of actual situations, and the range of choices available in any situation makes such action inherently controversial. The utilization of applied ethics causes disagreement as well, as people are fearful of "indoctrination." For example, Lilla (1981) cautions that the study of applied ethics is:

> ...all too likely to breed a vacuous form of casuistry and moral relativism in which students learn to make ingenious arguments about bizarre moral dilemmas while never being taught to believe in essential precepts such as not to lie, cheat, or steal" (p. 17).

Lilla explains further his belief that applied ethics is really casuistry:

> Applied ethics seems to mean taking a certain moral theory--rather than a commandment, as did the casuists--and seeing how it solves certain moral "dilemmas" we face in everyday life. Getting a handle on applied ethics is a difficult thing since, by definition, it is practiced in particular cases either in class or in the occasional essay (1981, p. 11).

Lilla perceives the emphasis of applied ethics to be on selecting various points of view from which to argue, and win, a point. "Applied ethics, as currently conceived, threatens to teach...how to justify actions with high-flown excuses, without teaching what sorts of duties and virtues make up the moral life of someone" (1981, pp. 15-16).

Derek Bok (1982), discussing the advantages and disadvantages of teaching applied ethics in higher education, argues that for students to be aware of all the troubling arguments that bear on important moral issues they must be wary of simplistic generalizations and unexamined premises, and must look beyond simple moral precepts. "In the last analysis, an important part of becoming an educated person is to comprehend the fundamental problems of human existence in all their complexity and thus engage with life at the highest possible level of awareness" (Bok, 1982, p. 131).

Despite the various drawbacks of applied ethics identified in the literature, applied ethics can be enormously useful for those who are actively engaged in decision making in higher education. Recognizing the value of applied ethics for ethical decision making needn't contradict the importance of theoretical ethics:

> Although philosophers engaged in applied ethics have sometimes been ridiculed and even ignored by their more theoretically oriented colleagues, the growth of the applied ethics movement has posed a challenge to theoretical ethics. Existing ethical theory appears to be faced with the alternative of providing effective solutions to practical problems or remaining ineffective and perhaps even irrelevant to practical affairs...Here is an opportunity for wedding theoretical and applied ethics; for using application as a means of testing and improving theory, and for enabling applied ethics to rise above mere casuistry or mere application to the level of philosophy itself (DeMarco & Fox, 1986, p. 12).

Paradigms of Ethics

In addition to the two approaches to ethics, theoretical and applied, ethics can be viewed within two separate paradigms: a justice paradigm, and a caring paradigm. Noddings (1984) refers to these paradigms as the "ethic of the father" and the "ethic of the mother."

The Justice Paradigm

An *ethic of justice* is ethical behavior which results from moral reasoning. The moral reasoning process is marked by the application of universal principles and abstract laws; disputes are adjudicated impersonally, impartially and fairly (Belenky et al., 1986). Most of what is considered "traditional" ethics fits within the justice paradigm. The history of ethics prior to the late twentieth century records the history of the justice paradigm.

Mark Pastin, in *The hard problems of management,* (1986), offers an historical perspective of the justice paradigm, and argues that over time it has evolved through academics, religious ethics, rule ethics, and end-point ethics. He considers Socrates "the high point as well as the first point in the history of ethics" (p. 17). Virtue was at the heart of Socratic ethics: "to live with virtue was to have reason rule the other components of the psyche" (p. 17). In organizations as well, Socrates applied a rational focus in the interest of all. Pastin argues that Plato, and Aristotle after him, turned ethics "from a practice into an academic discipline" (p. 17) to be studied and analyzed.

After many centuries within the province of scholars, ethics was then taken over by religion, and "ethics became a matter of faith rather than reason" (Pastin, 1986, p. 18). A rigid observance to ethical codes as prescribed by the Church characterized this period of time, and for centuries, ethical thinking was to be limited to the textual interpretation of the clergy.

During the Renaissance, the intellectual contemplation of ethics again emerged, notably due to Machiavelli's *The prince*:

> Machiavelli's work illustrates a crucial lesson about ethics: Ethics is a prominent subject when the fundamental institutions of society are radically challenged and forced to change (Pastin, 1986, p. 19).

It was at this time, between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that rule ethics was explicitly stated, in response to the "rise of science." The foundation of rule ethics is that rightness or wrongness of actions are determined by basic rules. Notable rule ethicists include John Locke (social contract ethics, which develop out of voluntary, reasoned choices), and Immanuel Kant (only rules that apply to everyone are ethical). Pastin argues that Locke's view was a "challenge to kings and aristocrats because it maintained that they could not rely on divine right to back their claims to power" (1986, pp. 19-20). Critics of Locke focus on the fact that "the reasoned choices of free people may still be influenced by prejudices and false beliefs, and thereby yield a social system that treats some groups inequitably" (p. 19).

Kant tried to correct the injustices inherent in Locke's ethics, and believed that ethics must address the issue of fair distribution of goods. Regardless of these variations on rule ethics, Pastin argues that:

> Rule ethics established the lasting sense that ethics is more concerned with the rules governing people than with the pursuit of wise and satisfying living...But there is something missing from an ethics more concerned with procedure than with outcome (pp. 20-21).

End-point ethics was explicitly stated between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in response to the industrial revolution (Pastin, 1986). Utilitarianism is the dominant form of end-point ethics, and was introduced by John Stuart Mill. According to Pastin, the function of utilitarianism is that "to determine whether an action is right or wrong, one must concentrate on its likely consequences" (p. 21). The great value of end-point ethics is that it forces people to question rules and/or institutions, thereby "challenging the ethics of the past" (p. 21).

In contemporary higher education, Lawrence Kohlberg is widely considered the most important theorist in connection with the justice paradigm of ethics. Traditionally, ethics has concentrated on moral reasoning, and ethical development has been measured with Kohlberg's stages of moral development (1969). Because of the hierarchical structure of his model, the discussion on ethics moves beyond human behavior and feelings--and focuses on logical progressions in the establishment of principles (Noddings, 1984). Justification arguments, which are characteristic of Kohlberg, require abstraction, and arguments about the status of relativism and absolutism, egoism and altruism (Noddings, 1984).

Earlier, in the review of the historical progression of ethics in the justice paradigm, it was stated that "ethics is a prominent subject when the fundamental institutions of society are radically challenged and forced to change" (Pastin, 1986, p. 19). The later part of the twentieth century finds us in the midst of what is often referred to as the *information revolution.* The new ethic of the information revolution, however, is not evolving from within the justice paradigm. As Naisbitt suggests in *Megatrends,* "high tech" needs to be balanced with "high touch" (1982). At the emergence of the information revolution, many are calling for a balancing ethic from within the *caring paradigm*.

The Caring Paradigm

An *ethic of caring* is ethical behavior born of a moral attitude. An ethic of caring requires an understanding of the context of the situation, and focuses on relationships and responsibilities (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). The ethic of caring emphasizes the set of *mutual* rights and obligations that ought to govern human relationships (Callahan, 1982). Barclay (1971) calls it "Person to Person Ethics:" a reciprocal ethic in which no privilege is ever given without a corresponding responsibility. Drucker (1981) describes an ethic of caring as "individual behavior which is truly appropriate to the specific relationship of mutual dependence because it optimizes benefits for both parties" (p. 31).

In contrast to the end-point-ethics of utilitarianism, Noddings (1984) suggested that human caring, and the memory of being cared for, are the basis for the foundation of ethical response. That is, the ethical response is born of a *moral attitude,* "longing for goodness," and not of *moral reasoning*. A comparison between moral reasoning and moral attitude can be illustrated through gender differences, through the way men and women typically respond differently to hypothetical situations. While men often move to *abstraction*, where thinking can take place clearly and logically in isolation from the complicating factors of particular persons, places, and circumstances, women typically move to *concretization*, where feelings can be modified by the introduction of facts, the feelings of others, and personal histories (Noddings, 1984).

> Women are not interested in rearranging priorities among principles, they are concerned with maintaining and enhancing caring. They don't abstract away from the concrete situation those elements that allow a formulation of deductive argument; rather, they remain in the situation as sensitive, receptive, and responsible agents. As a result of this caring orientation, they are perceived by Kohlberg as "being stuck" at stage three--that stage in which the moral agent wants to be a "good boy or girl." The desire to be good, however, provides a sound and lovely alternative foundation for ethical behavior. Caring will be the foundation for--and not a mere manifestation of--her morality (Noddings, 1984, p. 40).

The fact that women seem often to be "stuck" at Kohlberg's stage three presents *"the possibility that feminine nonconformity to the Kohlberg model counts against the justification/judgement paradigm and not against women as moral thinkers"* (Noddings, 1984, p. 96, emphasis added).

Gilligan (1982) challenges the male "voice" of Kohlberg's stages, and also identifies gender differences in moral development. Gilligan argues that Kohlberg overlooked the experience of women and girls in the establishment of his model. Kohlberg's oversight in the use of the male experience as the "normal" experience goes back at least to Freud, as the following passage regarding Freud's application of the Oedipus complex to the experience of women illustrates:

> For women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men...women show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection or hostility (Freud, 1925, in Gilligan, 1982, p. 7).

Gilligan notes: "Thus a problem in theory became cast as a problem in women's development, and the problem in women's development was located in their experience of relationships" (1982, p. 7).

Through the responses of two 11 year olds, Jake and Amy, to the familiar dilemma of Heinz and the drug (Heinz has a dying wife who needs a medicine which Heinz cannot afford. Should Heinz steal the drug from the druggist?), Gilligan illustrates gender differences in moral development. "The two young persons see totally different moral issues: Jake a conflict between life and property that can be resolved by logical deduction, Amy a fracture of human relationship that must be mended with its own thread" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 31).

Instead of seeing one view of reality as better, or more developed than the other, as has happened, Gilligan saw each as unique, different constructs of social reality. With this perspective, the dilemma isn't only seen as "a self-contained problem in moral logic" but also as "a world comprised of relationships rather than people standing alone, a world that coheres through human connection rather than through systems of rules" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 29), as the following passage illustrates:

> Her [Amy's] world is a world of relationships and psychological truths where an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to a recognition of responsibility for one another, a perception of the need for response. Seen in this light, her understanding of morality as arising from the recognition of relationship, her belief in communication as the mode of conflict resolution, and her conviction that the solution to the dilemma will follow from its compelling representation seem far from naive or cognitively immature. Instead, Amy's judgements contain the insights central to an *ethic of care*, just as Jake's judgements reflect the logic of the justice approach (Gilligan, 1982, p. 30, emphasis added).

In defining themselves, the children have two different ideals: "To Jake's ideal of perfection, against which he measures the *worth of himself*, Amy counterposes an ideal of care, against which she measures the *worth* *of her activity*" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 35, emphasis added). In defining responsibility, the children have two different ideals as well:

> To Jake, responsibility means *not doing* what he wants because he is thinking of others; to Amy, it means *doing* what others are counting on her to do regardless of what she herself wants. Both children are concerned with avoiding hurt but construe the problem in different ways--he sees hurt to arise from the expression of aggression, she from a failure of response (Gilligan, 1982, p. 38, emphasis added).

The challenge of the emerging caring paradigm is to integrate learnings about female development with what is known about male development. "The discrepant data on women's experience provide a basis upon which to generate new theory, potentially yielding a more encompassing view of the lives of *both* the sexes" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 4). For example, Kohlberg has contended that the moral lessons in the play of girls are *fewer* than in that of boys, since boys in their games are more concerned with rules while girls are more concerned with relationships, often at the expense of the game itself. But Gilligan (1982) suggests that girls learn *different* moral lessons, mainly that relationships are more important than competing.

These moral lessons are involved in self-identity: women first deal with relationships and then move toward autonomy. In contrast, men base their identity on autonomy and later deal with intimacy and relationships. But since our society values and rewards autonomy, and since developmental theorists identify autonomy as a dimension of maturity, men win and women retreat (Delworth & Seeman, 1984).

In the following passage, the application of the principles of an ethical model from the justice paradigm to a dilemma provides a powerful example of "moral reasoning" over "moral attitude." It is an application of

Kohlberg's conception of procedural justice, applied to a captain's decision of which of two survivors of a plane crash can accompany him in a two-person raft:

> Under policy 1 (sacrifice the old man) the probability of the old man's surviving is 0 and the young man's .8. Having an equal chance to be either person, the probability of surviving is (0 + .8)/2, which is .4. Under the second policy (the lottery) the probability of the young man's surviving is the product of two probabilities, the probability that he will not be chosen to be sacrificed, which is .5, and the probability that not being sacrificed he will still survive, which is .8. The product is .4. The probability of the old man's surviving is the product of the probability of not being chosen to be sacrificed, which is .5, and the probability that not being sacrificed he will survive, which is also .5. The product is .25. Assuming an equal chance to be the old or the young man, the probability of actually surviving is (.4 + .25)/2, which is .325. A prudent person using the veil of ignorance in this way would choose policy 1, the utilitarian solution (Brook, 1987, p. 368).

According to the Kohlberg model, this manner of thinking is seen as fair, and is rewarded in the sense of "moving along" in the stages of moral development. The conception of morality as fairness, typical of men, ties moral development to the understanding of rights and rules, which abstracts away from particulars (Delworth & Seeman, 1984). In contrast, Gilligan (1982) suggests that the moral development of women is concerned with the activity of caring, which is the understanding of responsibility and relationships in context.

Noddings argues this perspective further, and states that she finds it preferable to place an ethical *ideal* above *principle* as a guide to moral action:

> It has been traditional in moral philosophy to insist that moral principles must be, by their very nature, universifiable. If I am obligated to do X under certain conditions, then under sufficiently similar conditions you are also obligated to do X. But the principle of universifiability seems to depend...on the concept of *sameness*" (1984, p. 84).

The concept of "sameness" ignores the diversity of people, and the diversity of their experiences. To justify this practice, ethicists must establish "that human predicaments exhibit sufficient sameness" (Noddings, 1984, p. 84). This requires more abstractions, and losing the qualities and factors which made up the moral situation in the first place. "That condition which makes the situation different and thereby induces genuine moral puzzlement cannot be satisfied by the application of principles developed in situations of sameness" (Noddings, 1984, p. 84).

By adding to, "concretizing" the dilemma, an ethic of care moves towards situational ethics. "Situational ethics" doesn't mean that the ethics change from situation to situation, but that the situation must always be examined--filled in (Gilligan) rather than sliced-up (Kohlberg). By filling in the picture, a full appreciation of the cultural, gender, and ethnic differences contained within the situation is possible.

Reed (1987) acknowledges that "Kohlberg has conceded that his emphasis on 'justice structures' has sometimes obscured the elements of care, responsibility, and special obligation on which Carol Gilligan has focused in her recent work" (p. 442).

Another key difference of note between the ethic of caring and the ethic of justice is that the ethic of care requires a *relationship*. It is the difference between saying "something must be done" and "I must do something," the sense of obligation to another, not an obligation to a principle (Noddings, 1984). Caring requires a response to the initial impulse (of a situation) with an act of commitment. Noddings sees the Moral Imperative to be a "basic desire, universal in all human beings, to be in relation--to care and be cared for" (1984, p. 86).

The differences between the justice paradigm and the caring paradigm, then, are highlighted in the following comparisons:

Justice	Caring
reasoning	attitude
autonomy	relationships
worth of self	worth of activity
fair	care
abstract	contextual
justification	motivation
avoid wrongdoing	"right" behavior

(Callahan, 1982; Drucker, 1981; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1969; Noddings, 1984; Steinem, 1987).

Codes of Ethics

The literature from the business world as well as within the educational realm abounds with articles both advocating and opposing the development and use of codes of ethics. An investigation of codes of ethics is useful in moving the understanding of ethical decision making from the analytical (theories and principles) to the prescriptive and behavioral.

Furthermore, the process of making a code seems useful in understanding ethics and groups. There are many who believe that the group process of developing a code of ethics is even more important than the utilization of the code itself (Berhman, 1981; Callahan, 1982; Canon & Brown, 1985; Jones, 1982).

Perspectives on ethics presented in the preceding section contrasted "justice" ethics with "caring" ethics. In this section, it will be shown that the utilization of a code of ethics fits within the justice paradigm, while certain aspects of the community development and application of a code stem from the caring paradigm. This section will illustrate the evolution from the justice paradigm to the caring paradigm by addressing the utilization of a code as a part of a larger ethics plan, ethics and corporate culture, the punitive use of a code, and the use of a code to develop community.

The Utilization of a Code as a part of a Larger Ethics Plan

Usually, the "call for a code of ethics" arises as a response to internal tensions and external pressures:

> Historically, codes of ethics have been used to state the ideals of a profession or field, to legitimate the profession or field in the face of skepticism or uncertainty, to regulate the practices of its practitioners toward each other, and to delineate the relationship that should obtain between a practitioner and the patient or client (Callahan, 1982, p. 336).

Codes of ethics commonly represent ethical principles on which members of an organization and/or profession can agree. Consequently, ethical statements usually represent minimal standards, because of the need for shared agreement (Canon & Brown, 1985).

Even codes of ethics within the same field may differ in specificity, scope and nature of coverage (Winston & Dagley, 1985). For example, in the field of Student Affairs, there are six related professional associations: American College Personnel Association (ACPA), Association of College and University Housing Officers (ACUHO), American Psychological Association (APA), American Association of Counseling and Development (AACD), National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators, and Counselors (NAWDAC). Each of these six associations has a code of ethics. However, the codes vary considerably in the ways they address ethical concerns. The codes range in specificity from thirteen general statements (NAWDAC) to a comprehensive code complete with a companion 180-page ethical standards casebook (AACD). Despite the variations of specificity, not one of the six codes addresses how to satisfy conflicting interests, therefore in situations "where all the alternatives seem to be equally good or bad or where the ethical principles within a statement conflict, ethical standards [as embodied in codes] have limited value" (Winston & Dagley, 1985, p. 63).

While many advocate codes of ethics, most advocates state that a code of ethics *alone* is simply not enough to ensure ethical behavior (Behrman, 1981; Bowman, 1980; Callahan, 1982; Churchill, 1982; Genfan, 1987; Hoffman, 1986; Jones, 1982; Kitchener, 1985; Modic, 1987; Nash, 1981; Pastin, 1986; Weber, 1981).

> Few serious observers suffer from the delusion that codes alone will dramatically improve ethical conduct. They do serve, however, as enabling devices to strive for high ideals and as a record of professional consensus. Indeed, a code of practice is inherent in the very concept of professional life. Managers can read the text, ponder its meaning, and develop a sensitivity and awareness to the values proclaimed therein. Men and women working in organizations that value and nurture a reputation for integrity are the surest safeguard against corruption. Yet, if organizations do nothing more than announce their codes, it will be an abdication of responsibility and an invitation to public cynicism and legislative regulation. (Bowman, 1980, p. 64).

In the wake of the Watergate scandal, many business corporations adopted codes of ethics in the 1970's, and they thought they had done enough. "Now they come, codes in hand, and say 'these don't seem to be doing the job.' They want to *transform* them into management tools--training, communication, education" (Edwards, in Otten, 1986, p. 41, emphasis added). Edwards, the Executive Director of the Ethics Resource Center in Washington D.C., explains further the transformation of codes into useful management tools:

> The ethical atmosphere must come from the top. The code must be established, modeled, and articulated by the CEO. After the code has been reduced to writing and stated clearly, it must be communicated on a continuing basis. Furthermore, it doesn't do any good to have a policy if you don't monitor compliance (Edwards, in Modic, 1987, p. 36).

James Weber also argues for a larger ethics plan: "A company should avoid the false comfort of merely formulating and adopting a code of ethics. A code needs continuous change and revision; it should not be written, approved, and then filed and forgotten" (1981, p. 51). Weber recommends that a code, a monitoring committee, and a system of training are all essential elements for any board of directors to consider when institutionalizing ethics into their corporation.

> The term *institutionalizing ethics* is academic and may sound ponderous, but it has value. It simply means getting ethics formally and explicitly into daily business life, making it a regular and normal part of business. It means putting ethics into company policy making at the board and top management levels and, through a formal code, integrating ethics into all daily decision making and work practices for all employees (Weber, 1981, p. 47).

Behrman (1981) agrees on the importance of having a code that is institutionalized:

> ...it is probably worse to have a code which is known to be unenforced or unenforceable--or from which some are exempted--than to have no code at all. This is the problem with the honor systems in various educational institutions which are recognized increasingly as inapplicable and can be violated with impunity (p. 142).

Genfan (1987), like Edwards (1987), suggests a comprehensive business ethics training program, but he neglects to address the monitoring of compliance. His suggested program is also "from the top down," includes written policies which are clearly stated in job descriptions and articulated during company orientations, involves on-going management development and non-management staff training, recommends that ethical behavior be rewarded (instead of only punishing non-ethical behavior), and recommends that the ethical training program be evaluated often (Genfan, 1987).

Behrman (1981) agrees with Edwards (1987) on the importance of the chief executive in the ethical training process, and cautions against a "do as I say, not as I do" posture.

> The company or organization should provide a milieu in which the best sentiments of its people are translated into action, and which permits the continuing welfare and development of its personnel. This requires the development of an *atmosphere* of ethical behavior, signaled from the top (Behrman, 1981, p. 132).

Behrman continues:

> Mere enunciation in a code is not sufficient; *exemplary action* is required, as well as an understanding of the conflicts of loyalties and the grey areas of ethical decisions which individual managers face (1981, p. 134, emphasis added).

Role modeling is advocated as an effective way to support and assist compliance with an organizational ethic.

> Modeling is an excellent way to teach sound business ethics. It's no secret that if bosses act in certain ways, employees will follow their leads. CEOs and senior executives must show the way and help create an organizational climate of ethical behavior (Genfan, 1987, p. 35).

Role modeling could also teach negative lessons, however:

> As a cultural norm, pleasing the boss has priority over objective problem solving. It is expected; successful people do it; and the only way to effect change is to work within the culture of the organization. This, by abdication, has become its operational system of ethics (Kelly, 1987, p. 12).

The "pleasing the boss" ethic is particularly dangerous for organizations which mention ethical standards, but fail to implement them. Often, senior management develops organizational policy, communicates the policy to personnel, and polices and punishes others who violate the published standards (Kelly, 1987). Unfortunately, the policy has virtually no influence on senior management itself. When top leaders isolate themselves from their own organization or society, their communications and decisions inevitably reflect absolutist and subjectivist values. As other levels adopt the same values, counterproductive behaviors are legitimated throughout the organization. This trend can be reversed by "rejoining the workforce."

> To achieve a more ethical use of power, one must understand current organizational realities, which include the unwarranted conclusion that certain counterproductive behaviors are normal and even acceptable for the person who has or seeks power. These beliefs easily lead to a lack of commitment to the long-term welfare of the organization, destructive special-interest conflicts, and a reduced sense of community as organizations grow larger and more complex (Kelly, 1987, p. 17).

Ethics and Corporate Culture

"Corporate culture" has been a popular topic in the field of organizational development over the past decade. "Excellent" corporations have been identified by virtue of their clear understanding of and respect for their corporate cultures (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Weber's (1981) description earlier of "institutionalizing ethics" is, in fact, a call for a new corporate culture. Hoffman identifies the connection:

> The nature of the moral corporate culture is key. It must be created in such a way that definite ethical goals, structures, and strategies are clearly put forward to form a conceptual and operational framework for moral decision making. It must make clear to all its individual members that it values and will not tolerate any deviation from a moral point of view. But at the same time, this moral culture, which gives meaning, identity, and integrity to the whole corporate collective, must also value and encourage the moral autonomy of each of its individual members. To deny such moral autonomy is to cut off the possibility of rationally developing and examining the

ethical principles of the culture itself and to fail to respect the persons making up the culture itself--both being violations of the moral point of view to which the moral culture is committed" (1986, p. 241).

A corporate culture is "formed by its goals and policies, its structure and strategies, which ultimately reflect its attitudes and values. It is the set of formalized relations among the individuals who make it up, and it may well outlast those individuals who originally created it" (Hoffman, 1986, p. 235).

> Establishment of a code does not resolve problems; it is a guide to the limits of permissible choice...The objective of the code, therefore, is to express the collective ethic of the company and to support and assist the individual manager in complying with that ethic (Behrman, 1981, pp. 134-135).

Careful, intentional discussion about ethics can contribute to a greater self-consciousness about the culture of an institution of higher education, and open the question of what elements should be strengthened. One result is usually the emergence of a modest degree of satisfaction (and occasional surprise) about the consensus and priority of values among faculty, administrators, and staff (Smith, 1985).

Hoffman, quoted in Brown (1987), remarks that "ethical people can be brought down by serving in a bad organization, just as people with questionable ethical integrity can be uplifted, or at least held in check, by serving in a good one" (p. 50). This is because people don't operate in a vacuum. "They gain meaning, direction and purpose by belonging to and acting out of organizations, out of social cultures that are formed around common goals, shared beliefs and collective duties" (Brown, 1987, p. 50). The utilization of an ethics training plan would foster this type of support.

The Punitive Use of a Code

Although the importance of managerial integrity and senior management role models to the ethical character of an organization is strongly emphasized in the literature, in practice most codes are developed and used as a form of surveillance (Modic, 1987). The Ethics Resource Center cites that 74% of all large corporations in America have adopted a code of conduct; 50% of which were written in the post-Watergate era: 1974-79 (Modic, 1987). The vast majority of these post-Watergate codes "spell out what constitutes illegal behavior and what employees should not do, rather than deal with morals and values or ethics, the relationship of one person to another" (Modic, 1987, p. 34).

In a survey of 119 corporate codes of conduct, only four codes mention the importance of senior management role models. Apparently, most of the code writers have greater confidence in their abilities to administer surveillance procedures than in their abilities to generate an environment which would support ethical conduct (Cressey & Moore, 1983). Cressey and Moore suggest six reasons for codes being written in this way:

> --Top managers are too wise to rely on personal integrity alone and too modest to assert boldly that all personnel should follow the example of the president and the chair of the board
>
> --Reliance on oversight procedures is consistent with the fact that the corporation executive is a manager rather than an entrepreneur
>
> --Officials of the Securities and Exchange Commission have long advocated absolute authority of top management in ethical matters, and it is likely that their recommendations are reflected in at least some of the codes
>
> --The codes probably stress oversight procedures more than personal integrity and top management role models because top executives,

like everyone else, subscribe to the "get tough" position that is so popular

--The traditional deterrence approach, rather than a personal integrity approach, probably is stressed in the codes at least in part because it is easy to administer and, for that reason, protects top executives

--Surveillance-oriented corporate conduct codes themselves provide both top managers and corporations with defenses against possible charges that top executives have winked at law violations among their subordinates (Cressey & Moore, 1983, pp. 67-68).

Nevertheless, Cressey and Moore "suggest that top executives are now well aware of the recent movement to raise ethical considerations to a more prominent place in corporate decision making" (1983, p. 71).

The Use of a Code to Develop Community

Many authors believe that the establishment of a code of ethics should articulate the shared values of an organization and get people involved in the decision making process, since this helps them have a stake in the outcome (Behrman, 1981; Genfan, 1987; Kelly, 1987; Nash, 1981; Sashkin, 1984; Smith, 1985). They emphasize the *process* of developing and promulgating a code, and argue that this highlights the responsibilities of management (Behrman, 1981).

Jones (1982) argues this perspective: "while creeds and codes have a place, the *process of intercommunication* is a more significant and effective way to encourage ethical reflection" (p. 107, emphasis added). The intent is to refocus on the integrity of individuals within large corporations.

> The heart of business ethics today is a focus on the ethics of management--not talking about breaking the law, but rather how managers manage and how they may cause, by bad management, people who are basically good to believe they can't keep their jobs without action in an unethical manner. Part of the problem comes in the pressure for short-term financial performance, part is the reliance on MBO. It's much

> easier in the life of a busy manager using MBO to determine that the goal has been reached than it is to try to get behind the numbers to ensure that they were reached properly and in an ethical manner (Edwards, in Modic, 1987, p. 36).

Sashkin (1984) sees participation in the work world as an ethical *imperative* and views participation as effective in improving performance, productivity, and employee job satisfaction. Sashkin identifies four broad areas for the participation of employees: setting goals, making decisions, solving problems, and making changes in the organization (1984).

Participation "fulfills three basic human work needs: increased autonomy, increased meaningfulness, and decreased isolation" (Sashkin, 1984, p. 11). Sashkin cautions that there is substantial evidence that when these three basic human work needs are frustrated by organizational conditions, employees are both psychologically and physically harmed.

Kelly (1987) also argues that people at all levels in an organization have a lot more to contribute than is generally acknowledged. Kelly states that participation increases employee commitment to organizational goals and that group-generated norms are the most effective determinants of actual behavior. Therefore, Kelly recommends that senior managers need to re-establish their presence in the organization in such a way that they learn (or relearn, if they have forgotten) from their own employees that:

> -Employees have a universal desire to work in an organization with high ethical as well as quality and production standards.
>
> -The desired ethical standards of all levels and functions are identical and are the same values society universally endorses.
>
> -Unethical behavior by managers results in tremendous long-term costs to the organization.
> (Kelly, 1987, pp. 16-17).

Ethical Decision Making Models

An explicit consideration of ethics is an important part of an effective decision making process. Three ways in which to encourage ethical decision making have been suggested in this review. The first is through codes of ethics, since the codes can act as a guide for the decision maker to follow. Role modeling and attention to the "corporate culture" is a second way to provide for ethical decision making, since this focuses on the values inherent to the organization. The third suggestion is participative decision making, since participation and attention to group process increase commitment to organizations. A fourth way to facilitate ethical decision making is through the use of models. Five models will be reviewed in this section.

An analysis of models must start with an awareness of different levels of ethical issues which pervade decision making. R. Edward Freeman, Director of the Olsson Center for Applied Ethics, the Colgate Darden Graduate School of Business Administration, University of Virginia identifies four levels:

> -A 'societal' level at which questions are asked about the basic arrangement of institutions in our society.
>
> -A 'stakeholder' level that concerns itself with questions about how a company ought to deal with those external groups affected by its decisions, such as customers, stockholders, suppliers, the community, and the like.
>
> -An 'internal policy' level where questions are asked about the nature of the relationship between the company and its employees.
>
> -A 'personal' level which considers how we should treat each other inside the corporation (Freeman, in Modic, 1987, p. 35).

It appears that it is at the "internal policy" and "personal" levels where corporations fail.

The models of ethical decision making presented in this section range from a list of principles (Kitchener, 1985) to an extensive checklist and training plan (Nash, 1981). The five models address Freeman's levels of ethical issues to differing degrees.

Kitchener's Model of Ethical Decision Making

Kitchener (1985) offers a general perspective on ethical decision making, and her model is used extensively in higher education, particularly in student affairs. She recommends the utilization of a three-part process to conduct an ethical analysis:

> (1) The first line of ethical defense consists of *professional rules and codes of ethics.* Ethical codes function somewhat like a set of laws for an organization, since they are rules of conduct that are formally recognized as binding and that are enforced by a controlling authority, that is, the professional organization.
>
> (2) Ethical *principles* provide a general ethical framework for identifying the critical issues at stake and deciding among them. They are more general, abstract and fundamental than ethical codes. These principles are:
>
> *Respecting autonomy.* Making choices and acting as a "free agent" are dependent on rational decision-making process--autonomy is necessarily tied to the concept of competence.
>
> *Doing no harm.* Also called nonmaleficence. All things being equal, it is an even stronger ethical obligation than benefiting or helping others.
>
> *Benefiting others.* Acting ethically means not only preventing harm and respecting autonomy but actively promoting the health and well-being of others.
>
> *Being just.* Justice in its broadest sense means fairness: both in distribution of resources as well as in treatment. Both assume three standards: impartiality, equality, and reciprocity.
>
> *Being faithful.* This involves issues of loyalty, truthfulness, promise keeping and respect. Lying, misinformation, and deceit all

deny access to information that individuals need in order to make a free choice (autonomy).

(3) Ethical *theories* provide a rationale for deciding when ethical principles are in conflict. (Kitchener, 1985, p. 18).

Kitchener (1985) suggests that the process of ethical justification is hierarchically tiered--codes first, principles next, and theories third. The principles provide a level of justification and rationale for what is included in the codes. However, most student affairs practitioners only focus on the application of the five principles outlined in part two, and forego Kitchener's recommendation of hierarchical ethical justification. Kitchener does not specify procedures for groups in the utilization of her model.

Blanchard and Peale: "Ethics Check"

Blanchard and Peale (1988) recommend an ethical decision making model, the "Ethics Check," for individuals and organizations concerned with the pressure to focus on short-term goals to the detriment of long term goals. They suggest that "the most difficult aspect of being ethical is doing what is right, not deciding what is right" (Blanchard & Peale, 1988, p. 36). Their model incorporates three questions for ethical decision making:

1. *Is it legal?*
Will I be violating either civil law or company policy?

2. *Is it balanced?*
Is it fair to all concerned in the short term as well as the long term? Does it promote win-win relationships?

3. *How will it make me feel about myself?*
Will it make me proud? Would I feel good if my decision was published in the newspaper? Would I feel good if my family knew about it? (Blanchard & Peale, 1988, p. 27).

The model also incorporates principles of ethical behavior that Blanchard and Peale argue are essential in implementing ethical decisions.

> Principles for individuals
> *Purpose*
> I see myself as being an ethically sound person. I let my conscience be my guide. No matter what happens, I am always able to face the mirror, look myself in the eye, and feel good about myself.
>
> *Pride*
> I feel good about myself. I don't need the acceptance of other people to feel important. A balanced self-esteem keeps my ego and my desire to be accepted from influencing my decisions.
>
> *Patience*
> I believe that things will eventually work out well. I don't need everything to happen right now. I am at peace with what comes my way!
>
> *Persistence*
> I stick to my purpose, especially when it seems inconvenient to do so! My behavior is consistent with my intentions. As Churchill said, "Never! Never! Never! Never! Give Up!
>
> *Perspective*
> I take time to enter each day quietly in a mood of reflection. This helps me to get myself focused and allows me to listen to my innerself and to see things more clearly. (Blanchard & Peale, 1988, p. 80).

Blanchard and Peale note that while these principles may be helpful for an individual, within a work setting often "goal accomplishment is seen as all important--with the ends often justifying the means, whether ethical or not" (1988, p. 82). They note that "People...who try to act ethically, are often considered part of the problem rather than part of the solution, and are treated accordingly" (Blanchard & Peale, 1988, p. 82). Because this ethical deterioration in an organization can be traced to impatience in the attainment of goals and objectives, Blanchard and Peale (1988) also offer:

Principles for organizations

Purpose

The mission of our organization is communicated from the top. Our organization is guided by the values, hopes, and a vision that helps us to determine what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

Pride

We feel proud of ourselves and of our organization. We know that when we feel this way, we can resist temptations to behave unethically.

Patience

We believe that holding to our ethical values will lead us to success in the long term. This involves maintaining a balance between obtaining results and caring how we achieve these results.

Persistence

We have a commitment to live by ethical principles. We are committed to our commitment. We make sure our actions are consistent with our purpose.

Perspective

Our managers and employees take time to pause and reflect, take stock of where we are, evaluate where we are going and determine how we are going to get there. (Blanchard & Peale, 1988, p. 125).

Jones' Rational Model of Ethical Analysis and Decisionmaking

Jones' model (1982) is designed for business managers, and is reflective of his concern that "most corporate misdeeds result more from poor management and faulty institutional arrangements than from individual maleficence" (p. 16). With a belief that "ethical behavior is a social phenomenon" (p. 16), Jones recommends that the context of an organization must be evaluated to see whether it is supportive of good ethical conduct. By periodically evaluating the corporate climate, and consistently incorporating ethics into planning, "anticipatory ethics" occurs. Jones recommends a six-step ethical decision making model to determine whether decision making procedures are of high quality:

Step one: *State the ethical dilemma in plain language.* An ethical problem almost always falls under the following headings:
a. Competing values.
b. Conflicting obligations.
c. Cost-benefit trade-offs in predicting outcomes.

Step two: *Identify relevant facts, ranking them in order of significance.* This step assumes the importance of *empirical* analysis.

Step three: *Identify Relevant Values.* Values may be reduced to one term such as "informed consent," "minority justice," "honest," "sanctity of life," or "loyalty." Values may also be put in declarative sentences such as "humans have a right to life" or, "the public good must be served."

Step four: *List alternative courses of action.* A warning is in order here. Human beings have a tendency to restrict the options to as few as possible. We all seem to want to avoid or deny perplexity. One way of doing that effectively is to perceive issues in an either/or fashion, which is strategy to avoid complexity and ambiguity. All options must be considered.

Step five: a. *Rank values in preferential scale.*
b. *Rank predictable consequences in terms of certain harmful or beneficial effects.*
c. *Make your decision.*

Step six: *Adopt a proactive posture and propose a policy or institutional arrangement for preventing this kind of ethical dilemma from reoccuring. This is the issue of anticipatory ethics.* (Jones, 1982, pp. 24-25.)

The "anticipatory ethics" mentioned in step six reflects Jones' belief that "the best time to handle an ethical issue is before it becomes an issue" (1982, p. 17).

Nash's Twelve Questions for Examining the Ethics of a Business Decision

Nash (1981) offers a practical procedure to examine the ethical content and "human fallout" of everyday decisions in business and other organizational groupings. Her 12 questions draw on traditional philosophical frameworks but avoid the level of abstraction normally associated with formal moral reasoning. The corresponding descriptions of each of the twelve questions are summaries of more extensive narratives.

1. *Have you defined the problem accurately?* A true moral decision is an informed decision. A decision that is based on blind or convenient ignorance is hardly defensible.

2. *How would you define the problem if you stood on the other side of the fence?* The purpose of articulating the other side, whose needs are understandably less proximate than operational consideration, is to allow some mechanism whereby calculations of self-interest can be interrupted by a compelling empathy for those who might suffer immediate injury or mere annoyance as a result of a corporation's decisions.

3. *How did this situation occur in the first place?* In deciding the ethics of a situation, it is important to distinguish the symptoms from the disease. A full examination of how the situation occurred and what the traditional solutions have been may reveal a more serious discrepancy of values and pressures, and this will illuminate the real significance and ethics of the problem. The patterns, in isolation, appear trivial but as a whole point up a serious situation. This tendency seems to be the biggest ethical problem in business today.

4. *To whom and to what do you give your loyalty as a person and as a member of the corporation?* A sorting out of loyalties can bridge the gulf between policy and implementation or among various interest groups whose affiliations may mask a common devotion to an aspect of a problem--a devotion on which consensus can be built.

5. *What is your intention in making this decision?* This allows for a comparison between "ethics of attitude" and "ethics of absolute ends" (Max Weber). An ethics of attitude sets a standard to ensure a certain action.

6. *How does this intention compare with the probable results?* The goodness of intent pales somewhat before results that perpetrate great injury or simply do little good. Two things to remember in comparing intention and results are that knowledge of the future is always inadequate and that overconfidence often precedes a disastrous mistake.

7. *Who could your decision or action injure?* In policymaking, a much likelier ground for agreement than benefit is avoidance of injury through the "universal nos"--such as no mass death, no totalitarianism, no hunger or malnutrition, no harm to children. To exclude at the onset any policy or decision that might have such

results is to reshape the way modern business examines its own morality.

8. *Can you discuss the problem with the affected parties before you make your decision?* The issue of participation affects everyone. And yet it is a principle often forgotten because of the pressure of time or the inconvenience of calling people together and facing predictably hostile questions.

9. *Are you confident that your position will be as valid over a long period of time as it seems now?* Doing what you can get away with today may not be a secure moral standard, but short-term discomfort for long-term sainthood may require irrational courage or a rational reasoning system or, more likely, both. These 12 questions attempt to elicit a rational system. Courage, of course, depends on personal integrity.

10. *Could you disclose without qualm your decision or action to your boss, your CEO, the board of directors, your family, society as a whole?* This addresses the issue--do you want everyone to read about it in the papers? If you have trust with your boss, you can disclose the concerns frankly, and participate in re-examining the issues.

11. *What is the symbolic potential of your action if understood? If misunderstood?* The Greek root of our word symbol means both signal and contract. A business decision--whether it is the use of an expense account or a corporate donation--is a symbolic value in signaling what is acceptable behavior within the corporate culture and in making a tacit contract with employees and the community about the rules of the game. How the symbol is actually perceived (or misperceived) is as important as how you intend it to be perceived.

12. *Under what conditions would you allow exceptions to your stand?* What conflicting principles, circumstances, or time constraints would provide a morally acceptable basis for making an exception to one's normal institutional ethos? This makes you deal with questions of consistency, and can be a final test of the strength, idealism, or practicality of those values.
(Nash, 1981, pp. 81-88).

Nash (1981) poses these questions for individual review. However, Nash advocates the use of this model for groups as well because of the value of participative discussion. She argues that group process is valuable because it facilitates talk about a subject traditionally reserved for the privacy of one's own conscience, builds cohesiveness as points of consensus emerge, acts as an information resource, helps uncover differences between abstract values and the practicality of their implementation, and helps the manager understand how others think, handle a problem, and deal with complexity (1981).

When attempting group ethical inquiry, Nash advocates a process similar to the plans suggested by Behrman (1981), Edwards (in Modic, 1987), Genfan (1987), Hoffman (1986), Kelly, (1987), and Weber (1981). Specifically, the conditions Nash recommends are that the group discussion process occur in a fixed, uninterrupted block of time, in an unconventional location, with a resource person, with the participation of the CEO (for her/his perception and legitimization), with an organizational credo, the utilization of "homegrown topics," and that it needs resolution (otherwise, the benefits of the discussion are difficult to measure).

The credo is particularly important, because Nash notes that "the most important ethical inquiry for management may be the very formulation of such a statement, for the *process* of articulation is as useful as the values agreed on" (1981, p. 89).

Nash's motivation in the design of the twelve questions and corresponding procedures for group discussion was to address what she defined as the problem of the "philosophy consultant:" "The academician ponders the intangible, savors the paradoxical, and embraces the peculiar" (1981, p. 80). Therefore, Nash set out to develop "a process of ethical inquiry that is immediately comprehensible" (p. 80).

The Golden Rule

Two important concepts for ethical decision making identified in the preceding sections are an appreciation of *relationships* and an appreciation of *responsibility*. Nowhere are the concepts of responsibility and relationships more apparent than in what is commonly referred to as the Golden Rule. The Golden Rule, "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matt. 7:12), or something similar, is found in all the major religions. It is a "positive" ethic of thought as well as action, and feeling as well as conduct (Barclay, 1971). The Golden Rule is the foundation of many ethical decision making models (Drucker, 1981; Erikson, 1963; Steinem, 1987), and many authors reference it directly.

In a proposal for "feminist ethics," Steinem (1987) offers guidelines for the ethics of the future by combining "the flexible ethics of fairness without sacrifice" with "the ethic of empathy" (p. 62). The guidelines are quoted directly from Steinem while descriptions after each are summaries from Steinem's more extensive narratives.

> 1. *Whatever means you use will become part of the ends you achieve.* Women have learned that the end result always reflects the character of the actions taken to achieve it. Process is all.
>
> 2. *No ethical decision is exactly transferable from one situation to the next.* Taken out of the context in which it was made, an ethical system may become very unethical.
>
> 3. *The people with the most ethical right and responsibility to make a decision are the people who will be affected by it.* Process is still all. The principle is empathy, and putting oneself in the position of those affected.
>
> 4. *There is a human and humane principle called simple fairness.* The glue that holds society together, and keeps us willing to maintain any ethical system as a standard of behavior, is our sense that we are not the only ones who are trying.
>
> 5. *Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.* The most radical injunction is still the Golden Rule. It requires reflection as careful as one would apply to oneself. It turns healthy self-interest into equally healthy altruism. Ethics are their own reward. (Steinem, 1987, pp. 62-63).

An essential aspect of Steinem's model is that the focus is on the ethical agent instead of an ethical standard or principle. This represents an orientation from the caring paradigm. Steinem notes, "ethical judgements are beginning to come from below, from women and others with a clear view from the bottom" (1987, p. 63). The situational ethics aspect of her model with regard to the importance of understanding the context of decisions, emerges with even greater importance when combined with the need to understand the societal context of the decision maker.

Erikson (1963) notes that the Golden Rule appears in an astonishing number of the most revered sayings of western civilization. St. Francis: "Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive." Kant: "So act as to treat humanity, whether in your own person or that of another, in every case as an end on itself, never as a means." Lincoln: "As I would not be slave, I would not be master." (as quoted in Erikson, 1963, pp. 808).

Erikson (1963) also offers his own understanding of the Golden Rule:

> Truly worthwhile acts enhance a mutuality between the doer and the other--a mutuality which strengthens the doer even as it strengthens the other. Thus, the 'doer' and the 'other' are partners in one deed. Seen in the light of human development, this means that the doer is activated in whatever strength is appropriate to his age, stage, and condition, even as he activates in the other the strength appropriate to his age, stage, and condition (Erikson, 1963, p. 816).

Erikson believes that "all moral, ideological, and ethical propensities depend on the experience of mutuality...a relationship in which partners depend on each other for the development of their respective strengths" (1963, p. 815). This requires an active and giving attitude, rather than a demanding and dependent one.

Erikson describes a three stage development process which corresponds to broad age groupings: moral development (childhood), ideological development (adolescence), and ethical development (adulthood). Erikson notes that these match the traditional Hindu concept of the life cycle:

> The four intrinsic goals of life (Dharma, the orders that define virtue; Artha, the powers of the actual; Kama, the joys of libidinal abandon; and Moksha, the peace of deliverance) come to their successive and mutual perfection during the four stages, the ashramas of the apprentice, the householder, the hermit, and the ascetic. These stages are divided from each other by sharp turns of direction; yet, each depends on the previous one, and whatever perfection is possible depends on them all. (Erikson, 1963, p. 810).

Peter Drucker (1981) advocates the principles inherent in the Golden Rule through an emphasis on an ethic of interdependence:

> I would say, that virtually all the concerns of 'business ethics,' indeed almost everything 'business ethics' considers a problem, have to do with relationship of interdependence, whether that between the organization and the employee, the manufacturer and the customer, the hospital and the patient, the university and the student, and so on...the ethics of interdependence considers illegitimate and unethical the injection of power into human relationships...In the ethics of interdependence there are only 'obligations,' and all obligations are mutual obligations...But in today's American--and European--discussion of 'business ethics,' ethics means that one side has obligations and the other side has rights, if not 'entitlements.' This is not compatible with the ethics of interdependence and indeed with any ethics at all...In a relationship of interdependence it is the mutuality of obligation that creates true equality, regardless of differences in rank, wealth, or power (Drucker, 1981, pp. 31-33).

Indeed, Drucker (1981) argues that a society of organizations is a society of interdependence, and argues on behalf of what he calls the fundamental concepts of Confucian ethics:

--clear definition of the fundamental relationships;

--*universal and general rules of conduct*--that is, rules that are binding on any one person or organization, according to its rules, function, and relationships;

--*focus on right behavior rather than on avoiding wrongdoing*, and on behavior rather than on motives or intentions; and finally,

--*an effective organization ethic*, indeed, "an organization ethic that deserves to be seriously considered as 'ethics,' will have to define right behavior as the behavior which optimizes each party's benefits and thus makes the relationship harmonious, constructive, and mutually beneficial"
(Drucker, 1981, p. 36).

For the good of organizations and for the good of individuals, Drucker insists that our society must stress the ethics of prudence and self-development:

> It must expect its managers, executives, and professionals to demand of themselves that they shun behavior they would not respect in others, and instead practice behavior appropriate to the sort of person they would want to see 'in the mirror in the morning' (Drucker, 1981, p. 36).

The Golden Rule clearly emphasizes moral attitude over moral reasoning. The simplicity and clarity of this model is striking; it is a snapshot of the caring paradigm in action.

Integrity

The concept of integrity "bespeaks a unifying process leading to a state of wholeness, completeness, or undividedness" (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1988, p. 5). Srivastva and Cooperrider further identify integrity as "one of the key life-sustaining properties involved in the relational nature of organizational existence" (1988, p. 5).

> Executive integrity is more than a code of ethics or an articulation of standards. It involves the ongoing pursuit of value in the world. Integrity involves the search for standards of moral and intellectual cohesion and seeks to preserve the vital striving toward ultimate concerns that transcend expediency. Executive integrity...does not call for a codification

> of moral behavior but for an active, normative stance toward furthering processes of rejuvenation and fostering the life-giving properties of human relationships (Srivastva, 1988, p. xii).

Hence, the concept of integrity, whether for "executives" or for other staff, has as its foundation the caring paradigm, reflecting a focus on relationships, motivation, and worth of activity. As a model of ethical decision making, integrity calls for greater reflection on "the complexity and multidimensionality of organizational life" (Kerr, 1988, p. 139).

There is a tremendous tendency to command organizational life by denying its very complexity! This is done by applying one-dimensional thinking to multi-dimensional organizational problems, often in the form of a "Bottom-Line Mentality" (Wolfe, 1988). A bottom-line mentality mistakenly applies cost-benefit analysis to noneconomic values:

> ...the bottom-line mentality is a threat to integrity in several ways. It involves simplistic thinking in which financial success is treated as the only value to be considered or as the value to which all others can be reduced. Through role specialization it leads to disowning of other system values in favor of those that are one's own assigned bottom-line. It promotes short-term, quick-fix efforts rather than genuine problem solving and progress. It fosters adversarial relations through its gamelike qualities. And, finally, it creates a sense of unreality and a tunnel vision with respect to values when business transactions are treated as just a game. In a mentality that makes a god of money, everything else is to be bought or sold, exploited, or sacrificed in the name of the bottom line (Wolfe, 1988, p. 149).

The above perspective is a product of a coercion-compromise model of management, which requires members to subordinate themselves to the system. Wolfe (1988) suggests a new perspective, a collaboration-consensus model, with recognition that "one's own growth and well-being depend on the insight, effectiveness, and caring of others" (p. 159). The personal strengths required for effective leadership in a collaboration-consensus system are:

1. Active engagement in participative management.
2. Cognitive complexity and flexibility; a capacity for looking at issues and situations from many perspectives.
3. A spirit of inquiry.
4. Autonomous interdependence; real collaboration requires the temporary joining of distinct identities, not dependence.
5. Coming to grips with personal multivalence; if one cannot manage one's own occasionally conflicting motives, one is not likely to do justice to anyone else's either.
6. Detecting and managing conflict.
7. Appreciation of ambiguity and of differences.
8. Courage.

(Wolfe, 1988, pp. 163-169).

To be effective within a collaboration-consensus organization, an individual requires "more, not less, genuine toughness (both intellectual and interpersonal) than is required in coercion-compromise systems" (Wolfe, 1988, p. 163). Wolfe concludes that integrity is not something that one has, it is something one does: "a process of reasoning and valuing and creating. And it is a social process of valid communication, mutual accommodation, and synergistic problem solving" (1988, p. 171).

Maccoby also defines integrity as an interactional process that heightens and sustains the relational life of the whole (1988). To develop a culture of organizational integrity, Maccoby recommends open dialogue (1988). Waters (1988) agrees with this approach, particularly out of concern that a "preoccupation with questions of *individual* integrity is a perspective with serious limitations" (p. 175).

The research of Waters and Bird (1987) has shown that although individual managers think that the issue of integrity is important, the issue is not raised within groups of managers, because *organizations* don't institutionalize the concern. This amplifies the individual manager's sense of isolation. "A key source of moral stress for individual managers is the general absence of institutionalized structures which accord a public character to moral concerns" (Waters & Bird, in Waters, 1988, p. 178).

The antidote to moral stress is good conversation: dialogue among two or more managers who are struggling to figure out how to do the best job possible in a situation while respecting and strengthening the value standards relevant to that situation.

> Armed more with questions...than with unalterable positions, the participants in good conversation experience their interaction more as problem solving guided by values of inquiry and cooperation than as debate guided by values of strategy and competition (Waters, 1988, p. 189).

The group discussion process of the integrity model, "good conversation," elicits benefits similar to those identified by Nash (1981):

> Good conversation can have three main effects. First, it can legitimize ethical concern as an important dimension of managerial life (and probably allow many managers to discover how similar their views on moral standards are). Second, it is probably the only way managers can seek guidance and gain clarity about what to do in a particular situation. Ethical standards will always be general and abstract, and managers must always make judgements in response to concrete situations. Finally, it is out of public discussion and agreement that feelings of obligation ultimately arise (Waters, p. 179).

The concept of integrity appropriately expresses the spirit of an ethic of caring with the action of a prescriptive model:

> Integrity management has as its purpose informed and responsible action--that is, action which reflects the best information and thinking available and for which members of the organization are willing to take responsibility (Waters, 1988, pp. 179-180).

Ethical Decision Making in Higher Education

The majority of the literature on higher education and ethics is specific to the *teaching* of ethics, not the practice of ethical decision making. However, some of the issues raised by the scholars in regard to the teaching of ethics are appropriate to considerations on ethical decision making. Churchill (1982) suggests that four of the values embodied in the Socratic Method (a method of teaching with expectations, norms and values) are essential characteristics in teaching, and are also appropriate principles for effective ethical decision making. The values are respect for the otherness of students, a commitment to objectivity, a commitment to the integrity of inquiry, and enablement.

1) Respect for the Otherness of Students. This characteristic demands respect for the way students differ among themselves and from the teacher, including cultural, religious, and ethnic differences, as well as differences in experience, expertise and skills. Churchill (1982) cautions that teachers (and others in authority) forget what the dependency side of the relationship is like, and must strive to appreciate and respect another's predicament.

2) A Commitment to Objectivity. This characteristic requires the scrupulous presentation of fact as fact, and opinion as opinion, i. e., guarding against "indoctrination." As with "otherness," the teacher (or other in authority) must remember the asymmetrical distribution of power on a college campus.

> 3) A Commitment to the Integrity of Inquiry:
> Universities are among the few places in which inquiry is valued for its own sake, that is, without pretense of political or economic utility and with accountability for social maintenance or improvement left unspecific. Teaching must include some sense of protection over the forms inquiry can take, some standards that disabuse the tendency on the part of

both teachers and students to use the space reserved for inquiry for some other purpose (Churchill, 1982, pp. 304-305).

4) Enablement. This characteristic involves a kind of Socratic dialogue in which the teacher enables the student to think, to critically examine, to resist premature closure on ideas. Teachers must be open to novel ideas in a fundamental way, otherwise they cannot conduct an inquiry or initiate one in their students. Churchill notes that "Socrates suggested that teachers are essentially midwives, seeking to help in the difficult process in which each student gives birth to the knowledge that gestates within." (1982, p. 305). Churchill's suggestions complement the perspectives on the importance of relationship and responsibility mentioned earlier in this section.

Smith (1985) emphasizes values in higher education and advocates the process of participatory ethical decision making in higher education. His Society for Values in Higher Education (New Haven, CT) conducted a comprehensive study of values at eight colleges and universities, and explored the possibility that *explicit dialogue about values might improve campus decision making*. Hundreds of administrators, faculty, staff and students participated in the discussions. Smith observes:

> What careful conversation can do is clarify the significance of choices, increase the precision with which alternatives are defined, link the far-reaching implications of various decisions, and offer some sense of a common, public discourse amidst the diversity of interest and roles. The payoff of candid values discussion at points of real conflict can be decisions which command greater allegiance and have better prospects of enduring (Smith, 1985, p. 16).

Smith identifies three principles that are necessary on a college campus with regard to decision making: "...consistency, (as a form of fairness), promise keeping, and the advancement of the intellectual mission of the institution." (Smith, 1985, p. 16).

Plante (1986) also offers an emphasis on values, and relates values to decision making in higher education:

> Decision making in academe is no less value free than decision making elsewhere, nor should it be. Consequently, administrators driven by dissimilar convictions and inspired by different visions may arrive quite legitimately at varied solutions to the same problem. All well and good, for a college/university's culture is formed in significant part by a system of shared values, which an administrator should help form, should periodically question, and should consistently support. The great danger lies not in administrators on all 3,000-odd American campuses pursuing sundry ideals and promoting varied convictions, but in administrators pursuing and promoting nothing but peace and a harmony that often accompanies mediocrity (Plante, 1986, p. 1).

Derek Bok (1982) also identifies ethical principles as *responsibilities* for colleges and universities:

> Academic institutions must observe the basic obligations required of every participant in a civilized society. They must fulfill their contractual commitments. They must refrain from acts of deception. They must abide by the requirements of the law. More broadly still, they should endeavor not to inflict unjustified harm on others (Bok, 1982, p. 299).

Callahan (1982) focuses on participation and relationships, as well as responsibilities. He suggests that instead of concentrating on all of the ethical problems on a campus such as exploitation, harassment, lack of civility, etc., we look at relationships. Callahan defines ethics as: "that set of mutual rights and obligations that ought to govern human relationships" (1982, p. 338). The relationships he mentions are between faculty and students, faculty and each other, faculty and their discipline, faculty and administration, and the university and society.

Callahan discusses some advantages in codes of ethics, and acknowledges that the development of a code of ethics could reinvigorate some abiding values and commitments of the academic life. Nevertheless, Callahan does not think a code of ethics is the way to deal with the moral problems of academic life, since "codes of ethics have rarely been adequate devices for dealing with the ethical problems of other fields or disciplines" (Callahan, 1982, p. 341). Callahan argues that two kinds of codes could be developed: either "vacuous because it is too general, or overwhelming because it is too detailed" (1982, p. 343). Consequently, the moral dilemmas faced day in and day out can not be addressed by a code of ethics; the code would be insufficient to deal with those problems.

Callahan suggests an alternative to developing a code:

> Every college and university in this country, and every professional organization concerned with academic life, devote a significant period of time every two years or so to examining questions of academic ethics...the whole community should be invited to take part: debates should be organized, general principles organized for argument, and criticisms of wrong or doubtful practices pursued (1982, p. 343).

This process would be valuable because it would bring ethical problems to the surface for public debate, and "force people back to basics" by addressing the purpose of the university.

Clearly, a code of ethics is not a substitute for a mission, nor is it a guarantee for ethical behavior, especially when it is used for surveillance instead of role modeling. It appears that it is easy to agree on a code of ethics when it is stated in general terms, but the utilization of a code is difficult. The larger "ethics plan," especially with its origin in the caring paradigm, is offered as the most valuable product of the focus on codes of ethics. An ethics plan which includes attention to organizational relationships and responsibilities would be an important component in insuring effective ethical decision making.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

Introduction

This study uses focus group discussions as a means for understanding the role of ethics in the decision making processes of student affairs professionals. A second purpose of the study is to consider the method of the focus group discussion itself as a means to enable dialogue and conversation among student affairs professionals about ethics. One assumption is that in sharing their own, subjective considerations, the student affairs professionals will describe ethical decision making, regardless of their fluency with "ethical jargon." A second assumption is that the focus group discussions will provide an interactive process which enables group sharing and support around ethical issues.

The study is designed to create interactive discussion processes among professional peers at a single institution. The issues which the participants identify as important to consider when making decisions are examined in relation to the literature on ethical decision making. The focus group discussions are then examined to see if they assist in promoting a campus environment which facilitates and supports ethical decision making.

The problem is explored through four research questions:

1) Do ethical considerations enter into the decision making processes utilized by student affairs professionals?

2) How do actual decision making processes as described by the student affairs professionals relate to prescriptions for ethical decision making in the literature?

3) To what extent is an ethic of caring exhibited?

4) Does the focus group forum itself contribute to developing a campus environment which promotes dialogue on ethical decision making?

Research Design

The overall design for this study is qualitative. Information and opinion is gathered from a select group of student affairs administrators in focus group interviews and follow-up questionnaires. The design allows for the sometimes abstract issues of ethics to emerge from group conversation. According to Goldman and McDonald (1987), "qualitative studies look for the broader ideological motivational complexities that elude other methods" (p. 29).

The focus group interview is a qualitative research technique used to obtain data about feelings and opinions of small groups of participants about a given problem, experience, service or other phenomenon (Basch, 1987). A focus group provides an opportunity for an informal but directed discussion of a topic so as to assess certain attitudes or beliefs of the participants. It is particularly effective in providing information about *why* people think or feel the way they do. It promotes self-disclosure, and allows for group interaction and greater insight into why certain opinions are held (Krueger, 1988).

Focus group interviews have been utilized in market research for over thirty years (Krueger, 1988), however, higher education researchers have only recently begun to utilize them. Moreover, the few studies which utilize focus groups in a college or university setting concentrate on undergraduate students rather than administrators (Bers, 1987; Barrows & Malaney, 1989).

There are several reasons for choosing the focus group over the more traditional one-on-one interview. By their very structure, one-on-one interviews can easily be dominated by the interviewer (Krueger, 1988). Consequently, Gilligan's assertion that "...the way people talk about their lives is of significance" (1982, p. 2) could be curtailed in one-on-one interviews. According to Basch, focus group interviews are particularly well suited to "collecting in-depth, qualitative data about individuals' definitions of problems, opinions and feelings, and meanings associated with various phenomena" (1987, p. 434). Focus groups also challenge the assumption that people make decisions on their own and form opinions in isolation (Krueger, 1988).

Welch (1985) stresses the benefit of the interaction of the participants and moderator:

> Because people with common experiences participate in a group, the response of one person stimulates reactions from other participants. The discussion, therefore, evolves into a brainstorming session among participants from which a significant quantity of beliefs, ideas, and attitudes are generated (Welch, 1985, p. 249).

The four research questions provided guidance for the design of the study instruments: the moderator' s interview guide and the follow-up questionnaire, as described later in this chapter. The questions for the focus groups in the moderator's guide are designed to elicit data for the primary purpose of this study: understanding the role of ethics in the decision making processes of student affairs professionals. The second purpose of the study, the analysis of the focus group discussion method itself as a means to enable dialogue and conversation among student affairs professionals about ethics, is addressed twice: in the final question of the focus group interview, and through the follow-up questionnaire. The time between the interview and the questionnaire (one month) allows the participants to think about this question in the context of their day to day working experiences.

Research Setting

The University of Southern Maine is the setting for this research study. A public university in a state-wide, multi-campus system, the University of Southern Maine was selected because it has a comprehensive Division of Student Affairs, rather than a "one-stop" Dean of Students Office.

The researcher traveled to the University of Southern Maine (Portland, Maine) and conducted the focus groups on-campus in the Law Library conference room. By conducting the research on-campus, the intrusion on the schedules of the participants was minimized. Each focus group lasted between one and one half and two hours.

Research Population

The research population for this study consists of 26 student affairs professionals at the University of Southern Maine. The Division of Student Affairs at the University of Maine is run by a Vice President's office, which coordinates the delivery of services to students by supervising the following offices: Registrar's, Admissions, Advising and Information, Counseling and Career Services, Financial Aid, Police and Safety, Residence Life, Student Activities, Student Conduct, and Health Services. The participants in the focus groups were selected from these offices.

"The study objectives...ought to determine how groups are configurated and which sets of respondents should be shielded from whom" (Goldman & McDonald, 1987, p. 30). To examine the shared perspective of the student affairs staff, homogeneous groups were formed, grouping participants according to levels of job responsibility. There are three groups: entry-level, mid-level, and director level professionals. Because the study did not focus on segmented differences, genders, as well as different racial and ethnic groups, were combined. Ten staff were invited to participate in the entry-level group, ten staff were invited to participate in the mid-level group, and nine staff were invited to participate in the director's group discussions.

> There is widespread agreement that the optimal number of respondents per group is between eight and ten...experience suggests that this number provides a diversity of views and the benefits of interaction without seriously curtailing the participation of any of the members" (Goldman & McDonald, 1987, pp. 33-34).

Of the 29 student affairs professionals invited to participate in the study, 26 participated in the three focus group interviews. This represents 43% of the student affairs professional staff at the University of Southern Maine. More precisely, the entry-level group for this study was made up of nine staff, including one man and eight women, with members representing the following offices: Admissions (2), Transfer Affairs (1), Student Activities (1), Counseling and Career Services (1), Advising and

Academic Information (1), Residence Life (1), Registrar's (1), and Financial Aid (1).

The mid-level staff group for this study was made up of eight staff, including two men and six women, with members representing the following offices: Residence Life (2), Health Services (2) , Admissions (1), Job Development (1), New Student Advising (1), and Student Activities (1).

The third focus group of nine staff included six men and three women, and was made up of the Directors of Student Affairs departments, representing Residence Life, Police and Safety, Financial Aid, Counseling and Career Services, Registrar's, Student Health Services, Student Activities, Athletics, and the Executive Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs.

Goldman and McDonald (1987) caution against using focus groups in institutional studies involving participants who know each other and have worked with each other, out of concern "that prior relationships may alter the process by which group cohesion and interaction develop" (1987, p. 37). While this is an important concern, the researcher considered it outweighed by the desire to interview particular groups who share similar work experiences and therefore potentially share similar ethical considerations.

General Procedures

"Focus group interviews entail more planning and thought than is immediately apparent to those who think of it as simply a couple of hours of informal group discussion" (Bers, 1987, p. 20). The procedures necessary for conducting focus groups are to identify the purpose of the study, develop the focus group questions (moderator's outline), identify and recruit participants, pilot test and then run the focus groups, analyze the findings, and present the report (Krueger, 1988; Walsh, 1985).

The most important part of the planning is to limit the number of questions to those essential for the research topic (Bers, 1987). There is a tendency to gather superficial information about many issues if the goal of the research is not well articulated. In this research study, all of the questions in the moderator's outline have a direct relationship to the research questions which guide the study.

The initial contact with the University of Southern Maine was made three months prior to the start of the study. The Vice President for Student Affairs was contacted and asked if the division and staff could be used as the setting and population for the study. In a further conversation, the researcher identified the desired administrative groupings for the participants, and the Vice President was asked to select from the staff the focus group participants on the basis of those administrative groupings.

The participants were invited to participate in a two hour focus group discussion on decision making in student affairs. The initial phone contact was made by the Administrative Assistant to the Vice President, six weeks prior to the focus group interviews. It was stated that the research was for a doctoral dissertation, that participation was voluntary, and that the study was endorsed by the Vice President. The Vice President then sent a letter to each volunteer, thanking them for their participation, and reiterated that it was a voluntary doctoral research study. The focus group interviews were conducted during work hours, on the campus.

Two weeks prior to the focus group interviews, the researcher mailed a reminder letter to the participants. This letter reiterated that the research was for a doctoral dissertation, thanked the participants for volunteering, and informed them that the groups would be audio taped.

The researcher conducted the interviews over a day and one half. At the beginning of each of the three focus group interviews, the procedures for the study were again explained to the participants. They were invited to become participants in the research project and their written permission was sought before the focus group discussion began. The participants were told that complete transcripts would be made from the taped discussions for the purpose of data analysis. The tape recorder was visible to all of the participants, and after the signatures were obtained, the focus group discussions began. Plenty of time was allowed for response and silence was not interrupted. In respect for the time the participants were giving to the study, they were provided refreshments during the focus group interviews. An attempt was made to provide an unhurried and accepting atmosphere. At the conclusion of each interview, the participants were again thanked for their participation and informed that the researcher would return to the campus the following semester to present the findings of the study.

Within one week of the interviews, the participants, the Vice President, and the Administrative Assistant were sent thank you notes. The follow-up questionnaire and return envelope was mailed to the participants exactly one month after the focus group interviews.

Instrumentation

Because "qualitative studies look for the broader ideological motivational complexities that elude other methods" (Goldman & McDonald, 1987, p. 29), the skills required of the focus group moderator are essential to the success of the research (Bers, 1987). To respect the very nature and value of the focus group process, the moderator must be flexible enough to “go with” the group at times:

> When the moderator is in any doubt about the relevance of a topic that has been raised, it is wiser to absorb some loss of time and risk an irrelevant excursion than to choke off a potentially useful discussion prematurely (Goldman & McDonald, 1987, pp. 97-98).

Basch (1987) asserts that “in a sense, the moderator is the instrument” (p. 415), and specifies the responsibilities of the moderator:

> Creating a non-threatening, supportive climate that encourages all group members to share their views; facilitating interaction among group members; interjecting probing comments, transitional questions and summaries without interfering too brusquely with dialogue among participants; covering important topics and questions in the prepared outline while relying on judgement to abandon aspects of the outline and pursue other lines of questioning that seem more revealing; presenting questions in an unbiased way and being sensitive to possible effects of vocal inclinations, facial expressions, and other non-verbal behavior; remaining non-judgemental to participant's responses; encouraging involvement among all members... determining how group members feel about ideas or feelings that are expressed by others; and recording key insights immediately following the session (Basch, 1987, p. 415).

The quality of interchange is important in studies which use focus group methodology (Basch, 1987), hence, “the value of the data...is ultimately dependent not only on the moderator's technical skills but equally on the adequacy of the preparation” (Goldman & McDonald, 1987, p. 58). It is essential that the “objectives are explicitly stated in writing and thoroughly understood...without a firm foundation from which to launch the research, moderating is likely to be aimless and the results disappointing” (Goldman & McDonald, 1987, pp. 58-59).

The foundation of this study are the four research questions. Therefore, the research questions guided the development of the two instruments used in this study: the moderator's outline and the follow-up questionnaire. It is generally agreed that a moderator's outline should be limited to five to seven questions (Basch, 1987; Krueger, 1988; Goldman & McDonald, 1987).

> If an unrealistically ambitious scope of inquiry is attempted...expect an unsatisfactory outcome including superficial data, an anxious and frustrated moderator whose performance has been compromised, and just as often, a disappointed client who has sacrificed depth for breadth (Goldman & McDonald, 1987, pp. 59-60).

Six questions were developed for the moderator's outline. The moderator's introduction and outline and are found in Appendix A. Identified with the questions in the outline is the purpose of each question, and its place in the research design. To encourage discussion, moderator "probes" were designed for each question. There is precedence in the literature on ethical decision making for the use of hypothetical case studies to provide a common scenario for discussion (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1969). Therefore, two case studies were selected from a collection of student affairs cases for use in this study (Canon, 1985).

The moderator's outline is organized to move from the general to the specific. After the participants discussed the hypothetical situations, they were asked to reflect on real work situations which raised concerns similar to those identified in the discussion of the hypothetical situations. Participants were then asked if they had ever consulted professional codes for assistance in work situations. The final question in the moderator's outline directly asks whether the discussion had been of value to the participants.

One month after the focus groups were conducted, each participant was mailed a brief follow-up open-ended questionnaire. The follow-up questionnaire appears in Appendix B. The purpose of the questionnaire was to again ask question six of the moderator's outline, after one month's time has passed. The probes were similar, and also included specific questions regarding whether there had been continued discussion with colleagues about decision making. The goal of the follow-up questionnaire was to assess what (if any) impact the focus group had had on the explicit actions and subjective thoughts of the participants. Thirteen of the 26 questionnaires were returned; a 50% response rate.

Pilot Study

A focus group pilot study was conducted at the University of Massachusetts one month before the study. The goals of the pilot focus group were to sharpen moderator skills, test the moderator's outline, and test the audio tape equipment. The pilot group provided an essential opportunity to determine if the selected case studies would promote discussion and allow ethical issues to emerge.

Care was taken to select participants for the pilot study who do not work closely with the researcher. To provide a homogeneous grouping, mid-level student affairs professionals were selected. At the end of the session, feedback on the moderator's performance was requested and used in preparation for the interviews at the University of Southern Maine.

The pilot study was very beneficial. Nine out of the ten invited staff participated in the one hour and forty minute discussion. The hypothetical case studies were effective in prompting discussion, and in providing the opportunity for participants to reflect on how *they* would respond in such situations. Participants identified their concerns in discussing the hypothetical situations specifically as ethical considerations. After the focus group, three participants provided feedback on the moderator's outline and the clarity of the discussion probes. The observations of the pilot study participants were especially effective in redesigning moderator's outline question four, the transitional question which moves the discussion from the hypothetical case studies to a discussion of real work concerns.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from the three focus group interviews and from the follow-up questionnaire. The major source of focus group data was from the transcription of the audio tapes. The second source was from the non-verbal cues of participants noted during the focus groups. The third data collection procedure involved recording observations immediately after each group discussion. The observations included notes about seating arrangements, the apparent mood of the group, the participant's responsiveness to the various questions, critical incidents, apparent allegiances formed during the discussions, and any other observations which seemed relevant. These written observations were labeled as such, and filed according to group.

One copy was made of each of the typed transcriptions of the group discussions. The originals were filed according to group name (Group I, Group II, Group III) with the observation comments. The transcription copies were coded and filed according to the research question being answered.

Each original was kept whole in order to provide an easy reference to the context and origin of the comments. The copies were coded by color according to group, and identified by page and topic so that sections to be used in answering the research questions could easily be identified.

The written responses to the follow-up questionnaire were collected but not copied. This was a one-page questionnaire and the answers were short and specific to research question four; they were placed in a separate file.

In preparation for answering the research questions, four files were prepared, one for each question. Relevant passages of data were placed in each, and arranged within the file according to emerging themes.

Data Analysis

All sources were used in analyzing the data, including observation notes, transcriptions of the focus groups, and the written responses to the follow-up questionnaire. As a first step in preparing the findings, a summary was written from each group transcript, providing an overview of each discussion. Next, each research question was analyzed separately by examining the transcripts of the discussions and the other data sources that had been filed for that question. Then, the entire body of data was reviewed to check for additional material related to each question that could have been misfiled. The entire body of data was then again analyzed to see if any additional theme or topic should be presented.

One additional step was taken in preparation for the analysis of research question one. Five statements which reflect general propositions found in descriptions of ethical decision making in the literature were developed for use as guides for the analysis of this research question:

1) The participants identified problems as "ethical."

2) There were efforts to analyze the underlying dimensions of the problems.

3) The participants identified and were grappling with different or conflicting needs (such as individual vs. group) in the problems.

4) Various outcomes (or consequences) of behavior were considered while addressing the problems.

5) Participants identified their own personal principles which guide their behavior.

Because the first research question tests the assumption that the focus group participants would describe ethical decision making, regardless of their fluency with "ethical jargon," the preparation of these catagories of analysis was necessary.

Because the goal of this research is to understand the shared perspective of student affairs staff, systematic identification of the distinctions between the discussions of the three focus groups is not appropriate. However, throughout the analysis of the data, differences between the three groups are noted where group identity suggests different approaches to ethical decision making. At times, significant differences were also noted between the responses of men and women. The sex and/or the administrative level of the respondent is presented when that information seems relevant to the comment.

Goldman and McDonald (1987) provide specific suggestions for the analysis of focus group research data: 1) the analysis should begin as soon after the groups are completed as schedule allows, 2) groups should be analyzed in a sequence to compare relevant segments, 3) relevant topic areas should be identified, especially those likely to become topic headings in the study, 4) observations should be organized so that reactions can be linked to the reasons or motivations that seem to drive them, 5) the researcher must not overlook or avoid recording fairly obvious or mundane information, 6) the researcher should never ignore the lone dissenting voice in an effort to capture the gist of group opinion, 7) the researcher must be attentive to the order in which participants raise issues and the length of time they choose to spend on them, 8) the researcher must be attentive to the intensity of participant's reactions, 9) the researcher must note the reasons participants give for acceptance or rejection of opinions, 10) the researcher should be prepared to doubt or disbelieve some of what is said and to watch out for “socially correct” responses. The suggestions of Goldman and McDonald are extremely useful, and this researcher attempted to follow all of the suggestions.

Organization and Presentation of Findings

Chapter IV presents the findings of this study. First, an overview of each of the focus group interviews is presented. This is followed by separated findings for each of the research questions in the study. Chapter V provides conclusions and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, the data gathered during the three focus group interviews are presented: first in overview form for each group, and subsequently in detail, organized in relation to the research questions which guided the study. The goal of focus group research is to understand shared perspectives. The presentation is therefore oriented toward the *commonality* of response within and across groups, not the *distinctions* between the three groups. Additional data gathered from the written comments provided on the follow-up questionnaires are presented in response to the final research question.

This study provided the opportunity for the student affairs professionals to express their own subjective considerations when describing how they make decisions. The moderator's outline was specifically designed to provide opportunities for the participants to address each of the four research questions throughout the course of the focus groups; the design allowed for reactions to two hypothetical situations, as well as for descriptions of the participant's own decision making processes in real work situations. Further, the dialogues allowed the participants to build on one another's observations and to react to each other's statements.

The data will be presented as direct quotes, but without attribution to specific respondents. The sex and/or the administrative level of the respondent is noted when that information seems relevant to the comment. In most cases, quotes are given verbatim, and statements made with particular emphases are italicized. In some cases, however, sentences containing more than one thought are edited to focus on a single thought. In these cases, "..." are used to indicate that words have been omitted. Grammar has been altered as necessary for understanding, but every effort is made to stay as close to the original statement as possible.

Moderator questions and probes will be described in the narrative using the exact language used during discussions, but will not be provided with quotation marks. This method will enable the reader to easily differentiate the observations of the focus group participants from moderator comments.

Overviews of the Three Focus Groups

The following overviews present a "profile" of each of the focus group interviews. The organization of each overview follows the moderator's outline. The summary descriptions of the two hypothetical situations are provided only in the overview of Group I. (The hypothetical situations are described in full in Appendix A.)

Group I: Entry-level Staff

The entry-level group, made up of nine staff members from the Admissions, Transfer Affairs, Student Activities, Counseling and Career Services, Advising and Academic Information, Residence Life, Registrar's, and Financial Aid offices, were the professionals most likely to have one-to-one student contact, and some contact with groups of students. In their introductions, this group mentioned that they liked working with students, but that they were frustrated with university systems which make serving students difficult.

Hypothetical I. The group discussed the first hypothetical case, the situation of the residence hall-based "prank suicide" on the anniversary of a real suicide. On hearsay evidence, the dean and the residence hall director in the case immediately identified and punished those presumed responsible for the prank. Further, the dean and hall director advised the "guilty" students that if they didn't confess to the crime and accept probation as a sanction, they would probably be expelled from the university through the judicial process. The students confessed. The dean and the hall director were fully aware that there was insufficient evidence for a judicial hearing.

The first concern about the case raised by a focus group participant was that an error was made by the hall director and dean in that they were "threatening something they weren't able to carry through." The next group member's comment was for clarity (i.e. "could this be allowed in the discipline system?") but the third comment on the behavior of the hypothetical staff was in response to the opening comment, and is illustrative of the ensuing discussion:

> they are really missing the boat in that they just want an answer for who did it...it has to start even much more basic than finding out who did it, who it was, and then sanctioning them, that doesn't alleviate it. It doesn't get rid of the problem.

"The problem" as seen by the entry-level group is that the hypothetical staff should instead be wondering "*why* it happened in the first place?"

When probed to identify the motivation of the dean in the hypothetical case, the immediate response from the focus group participants was that the dean was trying to "control the students in the dorm," and "control the college's image." One participant observed: "As we all know, colleges or universities are very adverse to bad publicity altogether."

When probed for more comments, the focus group got into a discussion about the hypothetical dean having "put the hall director in a bad position." The focus group members were familiar with such predicaments, and saw the situation as typical: "we can all think of cases where things are done and somebody from higher up says...'deal with it'."

Hypothetical II. The second hypothetical case involved the behavior of professional staff in a placement office. The placement director, George, had turned the marginally effective office into a model office in just three years, and thus established a reputation as an innovator. George recruited a bright, energetic, creative young staff over that time. A small nucleus of the staff began to challenge George on program focus; George resisted some of their suggestions because he judged that the suggestions would undercut effective programs. "Having lost the battle in staff meetings," the dissident group is proclaiming their discontent and dissatisfaction to peers at other institutions and stating that George is rigid and unresponsive to staff input.

The initial problem identified by the focus group participants was "control." By "control," the group meant that George wanted to keep the unit working the way *he* wanted. One participant also mentioned that George could be afraid of "branching out," and the possibility that fear was controlling George.

The second problem identified by the focus group was concern about the "cohesiveness of the staff," and that the small nucleus of staff in the hypothetical case is "undermining George." One focus group member stated: "One of the problems is that the staff is sharing [their] dissatisfaction with others at other universities which is something that I don't do. It is not very professional. Every office has problems..."

The focus group also talked about George's need to have a "team focus," to "share some goals," and to establish his mission. One member expressed the need for this as follows:

> It's hard to tell when the fabric starts coming apart...need a team spirit, a unified kind of approach, and a philosophy of the office which hopefully is present at every meeting, present throughout the day, and present throughout the year.

Participants initially identified the problem as lying with the disgruntled hypothetical small nucleus of staff, because they were "talking out of turn." Otherss also placed the problem with George, stating that it was his responsibility to establish a team. The focus group participants then combined these two perspectives and said it was a *shared* problem of "missed communication."

Are there real situations which raise issues similar to those articulated in the hypothetical discussions which you would be willing to discuss? When asked if they'd like to share some real situations, the focus group participants began by sharing general, non-threatening anecdotes and incidents. After a short while, a focus group participant introduced a topic in the following manner: "I have one I'll ask you folks because you are all different." She recounted the "constant, ongoing battle with the old institution" where she had worked with regard to the question: "Who are you really there for?" She had been accused of being too student-oriented, and felt that the staff at the former institution were too negative, and were belittling the students. She explained to the other focus group participants how she had confronted her former boss: "I at least had voiced everything that I felt was real important for students to learn and for professionals to grow. I think it can happen simultaneously." In response to a probe that it sounded like she was trying to balance institutional versus individual needs, she agreed, and asked: "So, I was just wondering if that was an issue for you folks?"

Her query provided entry into a long discussion on the theme originally identified by the focus group members in their introductions: a concern with students not getting served properly, as well as a concern with the university's "bureaucratic morass" which makes their own jobs difficult.

Have you ever consulted a professional code for assistance in deciding how to approach a problem? With regard to using codes for assistance in deciding on a problem, one participant explained that she uses a code for facts, "as opposed to a decision making aid...its a tool." Another participant explained that instead of referring to a code, "when I have a problem making a decision, I always go to the director, and ask him about it."

The usefulness and the limitations of codes were discussed by the group for a while. When one participant exclaimed: "I hope nobody believes decisions are black and white," another person, who had previously remained quiet, stated:

> I think that's why, if I look at ACPA or NASPA journals, whatever, it would be not to help me make a decision, but it is probably I have looked at it *after* the decision has been made and I do it to validate and reaffirm that I am human. To look in a journal to make a decision, to me, isn't human.

<u>Has this discussion been valuable to you?</u> With regard to the discussion being of value, all of the focus group participants mentioned that they liked meeting staff they hadn't met before: "Now I have names *and* faces." Participants expressed appreciation that the discussion allowed them to know that problems are shared, "that you are not the only office dealing with that problem student or that problem in general in dealing with the system..."

One person was supported by many other participants when he stated that he would like similar discussion opportunities in the future, and expressed a desire for "a way in which we could share our perspectives on a given problem." He explained that an additional value of the focus group discussion was the opportunity for self-reflection:

> It's incredible what you learn about yourself, about your colleagues, about relating and new dimensions to a situation. I learned today that I guess I am more conservative than I thought I was. With things like this. I surprised myself. So that was good.

<u>Group II: Mid-level Staff</u>

The mid-level group, made up of eight staff representing Residence Life, Health Services, Admissions, Job Development, New Student Advising, and Student Activities offices, was the group which spoke the most frequently about their organizational placement in the division, "being in the middle." In their introductions, the focus group participants mentioned that they like the large amount of student contact required of their positions, that they enjoy the diversity of their responsibilities, and enjoy working within the "generalist nature of Student Affairs." The aspects of their jobs which the participants mentioned disliking include not having enough time or budget to get the job done well, and not having the opportunity for follow-through with students.

Hypothetical I. The group discussed the first hypothetical case, the situation of the residence hall-based "prank suicide" on the anniversary of a real suicide.

The first concern raised in the focus group was "what was done to help these students process the *first* suicide?" The focus group considered the effect the suicide must have had on the students and staff in the hypothetical situation for a period of time, and wondered about the emotions of the staff reactions. A focus group participant who works in residence life then reflected on her own experiences, and stated:

> [the hypothetical staff] obviously moved the truth a little bit to get them to confess, which isn't a real ethical thing to do, necessarily, but I can also understand being in this position several times myself that it gets real frustrating sometimes trying to find out what students do.

One focus group participant noted how the action on the part of the hypothetical administration was "so immediate." Another participant picked up on this line of thought, and cautioned: "I think when issues like this come up, it's really important that the administration, whoever is in charge of making that decision, take some time to process..." On the other hand, concern about the media was identified by a participant who declared: "No, we don't want this in the paper!"

The focus group participants continued to express diverse perspectives on the appropriate considerations and reactions to this hypothetical situation, especially in regard to the concerns of the president of the hypothetical college. One participant (a man) stated that the "logical" concern of the president was the possibility of a lawsuit, while another (a woman) thought the concern of the president would be directed towards the needs of the staff involved. If she were the president of the hypothetical institution, this participant would have the "let the Dean of Students share with me how he or she felt about the incident." Still other participants, considering their roles as the 'president,' expressed the need for "a lot more information" and thought that a responsible president would look at "the history of what other decisions had been...[and] make sure...that there's a disciplinary procedure already in place in the university."

Hypothetical II. The second hypothetical case involved the behavior of professional staff in a placement office.

The first comment made in regard to this hypothetical situation was the identification of the issue of "control," specifically that George was too controlling. One focus group participant explained that since George specifically hired innovative people, "he should at least negotiate with them."

Many participants mentioned that the "mission and goals" of the department should be rethought. It was stated that this would remind all of the staff in the hypothetical situation of the "larger picture." One participant, in stating that she agreed with the need to review the mission and goals ("I like your idea"), also suggested that mediation may be useful:

> [what] if another person was to be brought in to help mediate the situation...you know, they're looking at it very narrowly and if they could have somebody else come in and that person could help them, you know, put things into perspective.

The perspective of one focus group participant on the behavior of the "small nucleus" of discontented staff in the hypothetical situation was: "It's not only having an effect on you as a staff, but it's also going to have an effect on the students that you're serving as well." This perspective wasn't brought up in either of the other focus groups. Another participant suggested that the kind of gossip the discontented staff was engaged in is "always a lose-lose situation."

The focus group participants discussed for a while the limitations they perceived in George. Then, quite suddenly, one participant exclaimed:

> You know, I think we're assuming that George isn't [a good manager of people] because we're not directors...If we were all directors we'd probably be looking at this little nucleus and sort of thinking, 'Well, these people are all rebel rousers,' you know, or something like that, because we're looking from the down-up...

This statement revealed an awareness of the group's own middle-of-the-organization placement.

Are there real situations which raise issues similar to those articulated in the hypothetical discussions which you would be willing to discuss? When asked if they wanted to share some real situations, many focus group participants talked about having been excited about the student affairs breakfast meeting that the Vice President had convened when he was new. They were excited because it provided an opportunity to meet so many people within the newly-established division of student affairs. The participants stated that such a convocation helped them feel comfortable about working as a division, but frightened as well. One participant explained mixed reactions to one of the Vice President's goals of "overlapping and utilizing everyone's resources:"

> ...what that came with was not a lot of preparation in how to deal with a lot of those feelings...about people going into those different areas of ownership...There wasn't a lot of, I don't know, preparing for that...and some people were used to that...[but] sometimes that can be real threatening to some people.

That reflection on becoming a division provided an opportunity for a participant to express her feelings on the usefulness of having an overarching mission:

> maybe some people don't buy into this stuff...but I think that [Vice President] has really [established that] for us...that's what I got out of that breakfast, anyway...is trying to buy into some of our goals and missions.

Have you ever consulted a professional code for assistance in deciding how to approach a problem? With regard to using codes, one focus group participant said she and her colleagues had referred to one to help fire her boss at her former institution. Others were probed regarding the use of codes, and few had used them. Then, one woman responded:

> Personally, I use my feelings. So, if I feel the least bit uncomfortable about what I have to do, like lie or cheat or something, then I know that that's probably not ethical and that's why it's bothering me. And it usually goes by the code, I think, for the most...I'm a professional.

Has this discussion been valuable to you? The responses of the mid-level focus group participants on the value of the discussion were similar to those expressed by the entry-level group: "I think any time you reflect on something that you may do quite automatically, it's very beneficial." Another participant's statement reflected specifically on the new division of student affairs:

> I guess it was interesting for me going into different people's shoes...And I think that's really good because I think it shows that we're really growing and developing as a Student Affairs division and it makes me feel good to be part of that.

The final comments were in appreciation for the opportunity to meet other staff, and the chance to get to know them better.

Group III: Director-level Staff

The third focus group was made up of the Directors of eight Student Affairs departments, representing Residence Life, Police and Safety, Financial Aid, Counseling and Career Services, Registrar's, Student Health Services, Student Activities, Athletics. The group also included the Executive Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs. Of the three focus groups, this group has felt most keenly the changes implemented with the inception of the Student Affairs Vice Presidency (less than two years ago), since these directors report directly to the Vice President. Prior to the development of the division, some of the directors worked together, some did not. The majority of the directors who participated in the focus group discussion have been at USM for years. Two directors are new since the arrival of the Vice President, and two more directors are soon to be hired.

In their introductions, the participants discussed liking many aspects of their positions as directors, including the diversity of roles, the people contact, seeing the development of their students, and "making a difference."

During the introductions, a conversation on the value of having a mission emerged when a director brought up a responsibility (and frustration) of being a boss:

> We deal with staffs as directors, and our staffs put pressure on us to work to modify the university structure to make their jobs better, their jobs easier, their jobs more powerful...I think there's a potential trap there...What's best for a function may not be best for the student or best for the university.

Hypothetical I. The group discussed the first hypothetical case, the situation of the residence hall-based "prank suicide" on the anniversary of a real suicide.

There were immediate reactions from the focus group participants regarding this hypothetical situation: "Instead of removing people, it [would make] sense to bring everybody together and begin to talk about it...They really blew this one." Another participant stated:

> It's a deplorable situation...sounds like the dean and the residence hall director are behaving exactly the opposite way they would like the students to behave in the residence hall.

The focus group participants were probed to reflect on the motivation of the dean in the hypothetical situation. One participant stated:

> Well I think the dean was probably...one of the people most affected by the suicide. So if anybody got triggered back on a year later event, it was probably all the pain that the dean went through to deal with a death on campus and all the controversy about it...and I think that that person maybe lost some perspective on the whole thing.

Another perspective on the motivation of the hypothetical dean was press-oriented: "I see him acting out of concern for what the public is going to say about the event...I mean this guy is saying 'what's the paper going to show?'" A third focus group participant shared a different perspective on the appropriate way to handle the hypothetical situation: "I think that it needs to be handled in a community and if I were the director of residence life, I'd tell the hall director."

The participants were asked to consider this hypothetical situation from the perspective of the president; they were probed to respond upon hearing the dean explain that his/her behavior was motivated by assumptions of what the president would want. One participant responded:

I think that it's a valid question, in terms of how one makes decisions. If you're looking at that, then ultimately, you've got to be responsible for you own decisions and how you work that out with what you think your boss expects you to do, and their expectations.

The discussion of this hypothetical situation ended with statements acknowledging the need to "maintain the integrity of that system" and the fact that "one of the biggest problems we have, is that on our level and below, is that the people don't dare make mistakes..."

Hypothetical II. The second hypothetical case involved the behavior of professional staff in a placement office.

The initial consideration of the focus group participants was what should a "good manager" do? One participant suggested an analysis on the office environment:

I think it connects to what kind of a staff environment you are creating. How do you make joint decisions, who has veto power, and how do you deal with dissent? How is it affecting our work environment? You try and make those issues as part of the discussion.

Another participant stressed the need for reflection on the motivations of a manager: "I think, too, as a good manager, you need to make sure you're doing things for the right reason."

Regarding the hypothetical "small nucleus" staff talking outside the office, many of the participants expressed similar sentiments: "If the question is what do you do about that talk outside, I sure wouldn't lose any sleep over that..." and "I don't think you can control that, either."

The hypothetical case caused the focus group participants to talk a lot about the "obligations" a director has to new staff. One director stated:

I think that George has obligations to...help them shoot that energy in a way that's congruent with the directions of the department so that they can grow and feel comfortable.

Stimulated by the above statement, another participant suggested: "I think it is our obligation [as directors] to expect this three years down the road."

Are there real situations which raise issues similar to those articulated in the hypothetical discussions which you would be willing to discuss? When the focus group participants were asked to share some real situations, a new director jumped right in and explained a conflict between two groups of people in her office, and stated: "It would be good to hear your perspectives on how I dealt with it." After explaining the situation, she requested responses on "how other managers would have dealt with the situation," and received a lot of support for how she handled her situation. This director's story caused the other new director to introduce a similar staff problem. The second director hadn't been sure how to proceed in dealing with it: "But listening to [name] makes me think that maybe that [name's approach] would be a good idea."

The frank discussion initiated by the "newer" directors caused one "veteran" director to reflect on his experience in dealing with staff conflict. He candidly remarked:

> I always have a hard time with that issue...that's probably the area I feel the most incompetent in and the most frustrated in and get the least yardage out of, is dealing with some of those unresolvable issues.

Have you ever consulted a professional code for assistance in deciding how to approach a problem? With regard to using codes for assistance in dealing with problems, one focus group participant stated:

> I think you have to be aware of them...I can't imagine consulting them in a situation...my model is, I get them, I review them, I kind of check them out to see if I'm there...

Another director responded:

I think ethical codes are pretty much at a steady state in the way people conduct their business. I don't think people stay at a department head level or higher very long if they're unethical. And I think most of our professions have ethical codes, and I think most of the department head type administrators are probably following the ethical codes of their profession.

This statement caused one participant to reflect on his obligations as a supervisor to his staff to assist them in becoming more familiar with ethics:

I know I could do a lot better with my department to have these kinds of discussions. I mean, we do some of this hypothetical stuff, but not enough of it...

This reflection was especially useful as a transition into the final question:

Has this discussion been valuable to you? One participant considered the "real situations" shared earlier in the discussion, and responded: "It's fun...I've got situations too...that I'd love to test out on this group and get different reactions."

When the participants were probed as to whether they had ever done this before, one director said "yes." Then came a different perspective:

I don't know if I see it quite the way [name] does. I think that maybe that's longevity and you've seen more of that occur. I think for me, I haven't seen as much of that occur. I think I've probably been more guarded about my own shop.

The director who had said "yes" to having had this type of discussion before justified his response: "I think we tend to take pretty consistent positions...that we come from a philosophical base, from an ethical base, and I think we tend to come up in pretty much the same way."

Another focus group participant saw the value of the discussion differently:

It was helpful for me...we have never done this, I don't think, in the group...what I value about, say, a group like this, is that I tend to be a little bit like the emotional dean. I want to jump in and fix it right away, and I need people to say, 'Okay, let's think about this. Let's step back and go through the process a

> little bit.' And so,...I do this individually - go out to people. And I need somebody to help me through that. So, I very rarely, if it's a big issue, sort it out totally by myself. I think that's a positive, and so I would love to have more discussions at a lot less busy time.

Instead of expecting the "consistent positions" from the other participants which could be anticipated due to their established relationships, this participant valued the *interplay* of the differing positions of other participants. She asserted that such discussion would assist her in *developing* her own responses to challenging situations.

Do Ethical Considerations Enter into the Decision Making Processes of Student Affairs Professionals?

The first research question was designed to see if, in sharing their own subjective thoughts on decision making, student affairs professionals would include ethical considerations. The starting assumption was that student affairs professionals would describe ethical decision making, regardless of their fluency with "ethical jargon." To test the assumption, the moderator did not use the word "ethical" during the interviews.

Responses of the focus group participants were consistent with the assumption. The conversations regarding the hypothetical situations quickly turned to issues of ethics, and remained there.

The participant's use of the word "ethical" was the most obvious way to identify any "ethical considerations" raised during the discussions. However, "ethical considerations" were also inferred from the discussions. The following five statements reflect general propositions found in descriptions of ethical decision making in the literature. They were used as guides for the analysis of this research question, and served as "clues" to ethical considerations in making decisions:

1) The participants identified problems as "ethical."

2) There were efforts to analyze the underlying dimensions of the problems.

3) The participants identified and were grappling with different or conflicting needs (such as individual vs. group) in the problems.

4) Various outcomes (or consequences) of behavior were considered while addressing the problems.

5) Participants identified their own personal principles which guide their behavior.

All five of these considerations were mentioned in the course of the focus group discussions, and did appear to connect directly to ethical considerations. In addition, the participants revealed the significant impact that organizational structures and missions had on their decision making processes. Organizational considerations will be addressed in the Additional Findings section of this chapter.

<u>The Participants Identified the Problems as "Ethical"</u>

Although participants in all of the groups used the word "ethical" at some point in the discussions, only the groups of entry-level and mid-level staff used the word in identifying the issues inherent in the hypothetical situations. For example, once one person in the mid-level group introduced the word "ethical" to identify what concerned him about hypothetical case one, (the situation of the residence hall-based "prank suicide" on the anniversary of a real suicide), all three members in the ensuing conversation used the word. The following quotes from that conversation illustrate the ways that the ethical theme was elaborated.

> And then I would question the way that, you know, the ethical part of their telling a false...to get information, you know. And

> it would just seem that that's just as bad as someone hiding the truth from them...they're doing behavior that they're punishing people for.

In response, one woman reflected on her own experiences, and followed with:

> They obviously moved the truth a little bit to get them to confess, which isn't a real ethical thing to do, necessarily, but I can also understand being in this position several times myself, that it gets real frustrating sometimes trying to find out what students do.

This statement caused a group member to note how the action on the part of the administration was "so immediate," which caused another to state:

> It's so easy to jump into something like that, that you should take the time to sit back and think about what am I...you know...what kind of example am I setting if I'm doing something unethical, like you alluded to earlier. I think that's really important. They've got to look at *their* behavior, too, because it's supposed to be a *learning* experience for everybody who's involved with this...it's educational discipline. So I think that's just another factor that should be considered.

In the entry-level group, the term "ethical" was used when the participants were probed to consider responding to the situation in hypothetical case one (prank suicide) within the role of the President of "Hypothetical U:"

> As president, where I would be really disturbed, is where people that I employ are making some really weird decisions that I don't know are ethically or morally right...That is just not right, to use your position to bully students to confessing something...they are as much culprits as the three [students].

Another dilemma described as "ethical" by focus group participants was prompted by the second hypothetical case, (the behavior of professional staff in a placement office), and the issue of "unprofessional" staff relations was raised. In discussing the difficulty of confronting a supervisor, one staff member made a distinction between problems with an office and problems with a supervisor:

I think the more difficult the problem, the more difficult the situation...Ethical problems are more difficult to deal with with your boss, especially if your boss is unethical, then a situation like *this*,...If you really think that your boss has done something *wrong*, it would be much more difficult to talk to that person about it than it would be for something that had to do with the actual office.

The Underlying Dimensions of the Problems Were Analyzed

Respondents in all three focus groups made an effort to analyze the underlying dimensions of problems, both those presented in the hypothetical cases and those within the real situations described by participants. Participants would often mention the need for understanding the larger context of situations with statements like: "I think a lot of these problems are indicative of things going on underneath the surface."

The desire for additional information to assist in making decisions can be viewed as concern with situational ethics. Situational ethics is grounded in an ethic of caring, because it centers around the understanding of responsibility and relationships in context (Gilligan, 1982). Situational ethics doesn't mean that the ethics change from situation to situation, but that the situation must always be examined, filled-in, (according to Gilligan), rather than sliced-up (as Gilligan describes Kohlberg's approach). By filling-in the picture, a full appreciation of the differences and needs contained within the situation is possible.

The concern with underlying dimensions was evident in the fact that the initial question raised in all of the groups about the first hypothetical situation was: "What was done to help these students process the *first* suicide?" An example of this concern:

I would have to know what they meant by throwing it out the window. Like did they mean 'we're throwing out just to make a mockery of the suicide' or was it some ceremonial thing that they felt like...sort of like when you throw a wreath off a boat...for someone who drowned there...that type of thing? I'd have to see...they might not have picked the right way of doing stuff, but then, people or students...they're supposed to have all the right answers at that point in time?

Concern with underlying dimensions was also revealed in the concern for staff reaction in the first hypothetical situation. Specifically, participants felt that the staff should have been wondering "why it happened in the first place?"

> [the staff in hypothetical case one] are really missing the boat in that they just want an answer for who did it...it has to start even much more basic than finding out who did it, who it was and then sanctioning them, that doesn't alleviate it. It doesn't get rid of the problem.

The questions the focus group members raised illustrate their desire to better understand the motivations and needs of the students involved, as well as the motivations and needs of the staff members. Such underlying concerns, although not specific to the "solution" of the problem at hand, reflect the perspective of the student affairs staff that such information is essential in addressing the problem successfully, a perspective shared among all three administrative levels. As one director stated:

> I think the dean was probably the one, one of the people most affected by the suicide. So if anybody got triggered back on a year later event, it was probably all the pain that the dean went through to deal with a death on campus and all the controversy about it...and I think that that person maybe lost some perspective on the whole thing. But I think that without question his or her need to work through some of the unresolved feelings and take charge of something, I think is a big part of it.

The Participants Identified and Were Grappling with Different or Conflicting Needs

Focus group participants identified conflicting needs most clearly when they talked about their own real job responsibilities and pressures. One entry-level woman recounted the "constant, on-going battle" she had had with her former institution over the issue of whether staff served students or the organization. She explained:

> I live-in with the students. I don't necessarily go to classes with them, but I see them when they wake up, I see them when they should be in bed. The age old question, it is probably easier if you are older and living in. I am almost their age, and that is 'who are you really there for?' And I had a constant ongoing battle with the old institution that I used to work at, that the department, it was so easy for them to get caught up in the directorship and the university or the college at large, that I felt that they were losing, I guess, their own focus on the student, like being student-oriented and that they wouldn't have jobs if the students weren't there. And their claim was I was <u>too</u> student-oriented and couldn't get back into buying into the bureaucracy and the red tape. So, there I was like one voice in a meeting that constantly said 'just because he broke his dorm window, he's not necessarily going to be the one who pulled the fire alarm.' Like one bad incident doesn't make him the bad guy the whole time. And it was real easy for them to buy in to that once bad-always bad kind of thing. And eventually, it was just a matter of going to the director himself and saying I can't sit in a staff meeting where you just belittle the students anymore. All we do is we deal with the negative. And it's really easy, and I have to stop myself here, today, every time, that it's real easy to constantly look at the bad kids or just the major incidents that take a lot of energy for a given amount of time, rather than look at some of the many successes that happen along the way as well. I would just be interested in how you folks dealt with this, because eventually it meant my leaving that institution because I didn't want a part of it any more. But I could do that and not feel bad, because I at least had voiced everything that I felt was real important for students to learn and for professionals to grow. I think it can happen simultaneously. But I wasn't hypocritical and I said it all. I waited a good time and I didn't see any change, so I didn't renew my contract. I was wondering if

> that happens at all to you folks. Because it got to a point where I really wanted to buy into the students more at that point than the administration.

This quote is included in its entirety because it illustrates the many factors that the respondent felt were important to consider in her struggle to understand the conflicting needs of the students, the administration, and herself.

The consideration of conflicting needs requires time and perspective. One director shared his concerns regarding his responsibilities to his staff, as well as to the division:

> I guess the other dimension I see is we deal with staffs as directors and our staffs put pressure on us to work to modify the university structure to make their jobs better, their jobs easier, their jobs more powerful. I think we respond to that as directors. I think there's a potential trap there, what's best for [this] office may not be the best for the student and if you respond and structure your function to make things nice for staff, you can do damage to other functions, other departments and to the students. And it's intention you deal with. What's best for a function may not be best for the student or best for the university. And it's a tough battle because you live with your staff day in and day out and there's a tension there that's a natural one. I think we give in to that tension in some cases and as we do, [we do] some damage to some students and [to] some other functions.

In both situations described above, participants acknowledged the need to accept personal responsibility for responding to the conflicting needs. In comparison to utilitarian concerns, which focus on the outcomes of actions undertaken, the consideration of an individual's own behavior *while making* decisions represents a focus on ethics.

Various Outcomes or Consequences of Behavior Were Considered

Participants discussed outcomes and or consequences of behavior while addressing the hypothetical cases and other decision making situations, and they connected such outcomes to ethical judgements. Although no actual decisions were planned and implemented during the discussions, the ethical consequences of potential outcomes were analyzed by the participants in their discussions of the hypothetical situations. Participants in all of the groups raised possible outcomes while addressing the problems.

In all of the groups, participants focused immediately on the consequences of the behavior of the hypothetical staff in hypothetical case one with comments of concern, as these quotes indicate:

> "[they were] threatening something they weren't able to carry through;"
>
> "It's a deplorable situation...sounds like the dean and the residence hall director are behaving exactly the opposite way they would like the students to behave in the residence hall;"
>
> "It was that sort of paternal or authoritative way to resolve this problem rather than the collaborative way;"
>
> "I think they lost credibility with the student clientele."

After listening to his focus group discuss some of the possible ways for the staff to deal with the prank suicide in hypothetical case one, one group member acknowledged that the "human" concerns of the predicament were worthy of concern. However, he introduced an additional measure of the consequences of behavior, akin to Nash's (1981) concept of "universal no's":

> I think that our reaction that...consciousness raising, group sessions talking about suicide, are definitely in order in this situation. The other aspect, however, that really troubles me are, these people did something that brought out medical rescue personnel who should not have had to be brought out. The same thing as with a false fire alarm, yelling 'fire' in a crowded theater. Negative sanctions or something, some kind of discipline is in order...People can't do that and expect that it's going to be okay.

Participants Identified Their Own Personal Principles Which Guide Their Behavior

Participants also identified the personal principles which guide their own behavior in the course of the discussions. In response to the interview question regarding the use of professional codes to assist in decision making, all of the groups had members who shared their personal perceptions. Blanchard and Peale (1988) strongly urge reflection on "personal principles" for guidance in ethical decision making. In identifying the principle of one's "purpose," Blanchard and Peale explain that it includes the ability to "let my conscience be my guide" (1988, p. 80).

In the entry-level group, one person who had been quiet during the discussion on codes jumped up when someone said "I hope nobody believes decisions are black and white" and stated:

> I think that's why, if I look at ACPA or NASPA journals, whatever, it would be not to help me make a decision, but it is probably...I have looked at it after the decision has been made and I do it to validate and reaffirm that I am human. To look in a journal to make a decision, to me, isn't human.

When probed as to where she does look for guidance, she responded: "I think I fall a lot on conviction and commitment to the profession."

A director simply stated: "I'm comfortable dealing from my own frame of reference," whereas the explanation from a mid-level staff person was much more descriptive:

> Personally, I use my feelings. So, if I feel the least bit uncomfortable about what I have to do, like lie or cheat or something, then I know that that's probably not ethical and that's why it's bothering me. And it usually goes by the code, I think, for the most...I'm a professional...When I feel uncomfortable, I usually think about it for a long time. I don't

mean for, like, years, (laughter) but I re-think about it for a while before I discuss it with people.

This section has provided examples of some the ethical considerations inherent in the decision making processes of student affairs professionals. These data were gathered from the responses of the participants to the hypothetical and real work situations discussed in the focus group interviews. The findings presented reveal that the utilization of the word "ethical" is only one of *many* indicators that decision making processes include ethical considerations. Therefore, a facility with "ethical jargon" is not the sole indicator of whether a student affairs professional considers ethics when making decisions.

How do Actual Decision Making Processes as Described by the Student Affairs Professionals Relate to Prescriptions for Ethical Decision Making in the Literature?

The second research question calls for a comparison of the decision making processes described by student affairs professionals and the prescriptions for ethical decision making in the literature. The intent was to see if there was any relationship between the two.

In their discussions of the hypothetical case studies, and in descriptions of their own decision making processes, the members of all three focus groups echoed themes found in the literature on decision making. Predominantly, two themes were identified: the examination of codes of ethics, and the utilization of ethical decision making models.

Unanticipated findings were the extent to which the focus group participants considered organizational issues in making decisions. Issues such as organizational missions, organizational responsibilities, and the consideration of the influence of others within the organization guided the actions of student affairs in all three focus groups, and influenced the decisions they made. These findings on organizational issues are related to the literature in a more general way than the findings on ethical codes and ethical decision making models. However, these organizational considerations are seen as important because of the great extent to which they are referenced by the focus group participants. These findings, together with some references to organizational literature, will be presented at the end of this chapter in a section on Additional Findings.

The Participants Referred to Codes of Ethics to Assist in Decision Making

As discussed in the Review of the Literature chapter, codes of ethics commonly represent ethical principles on which members of an organization and/or profession can agree. Consequently, ethical statements usually represent minimal standards, because of the need for shared agreement (Canon & Brown, 1985).

> Historically, codes of ethics have been used to state the ideals of a profession or field, to legitimate the profession or field in the face of skepticism or uncertainty, to regulate the practices of its practitioners toward each other, and to delineate the relationship that should obtain between a practitioner and the patient or client. (Callahan, 1982, p. 336).

In all of the groups, the members made reference to using codes only when the moderator asked directly about them. During the discussion of the entry-level staff, the limitation of one professional code (for Admissions officers and Registrar officers) was identified. One participant explained that she used the code to see “who can, without written request, have transcripts.” Another participant responded:

> I use an AACRAO guide every day, not for that same reason...I have to look up every institution to make sure that it has regional accreditation and so, that is not helping me, I am

not looking for *answers*. I don't know, it's not the same type of thing that [earlier respondent] uses it for. I use it on a daily basis, but it is just to check to see what kind of accreditation that school has.

A third focus group participant noted the distinctions in the use of the code were as follows:

> ...a factual [source], perhaps, as opposed to a decision making aid. Where you [addressing the first] are actually trying to decide 'should this person get a transcript' or whereas you [addressing the second] are using it for purely factual information.

The second respondent agreed: [yeah] It's a *tool*.

A focus group member of the mid-level staff group also talked about a code as being a useful tool:

> I know I use the NACA ethic laws because it helps me a lot when I'm dealing with associate member or agents because it helps me to help them understand some things that they have to put in contract...in writing and they feel a little more comfortable at making those decisions.

In one real work situation described by a mid-level staff person, following the organizational norm of "going through the channels" did not assist in solving a problem--the code of ethics did:

> When I was at another college...we were trying to get our supervisor fired (laughter)...something had to be done. (Was it George?) No, it wasn't George....I don't want to mention names...It was when I first started in Student Affairs. I was a Resident Director in a small Catholic college and my supervisor was getting drunk at work and putting the moves on Resident Assistants at staff functions...sexually harassing Resident Assistants--female Resident Assistants--and doing really inappropriate things. I think the straw that broke our backs was when he had told the Vice President that the Resident Directors didn't get their reports in on time and we all *had* gotten our reports in on time and he tried to make us look really bad. Well, we were sick and tired of all these things *and* confronting him. I mean, as a process each one of us individually had confronted him and told him how we felt about things and you know, about his specific behavior. We did everything *right*, I think, that we were supposed to do and things weren't changing. Then we talked to the Dean of

Students and she didn't do anything about it, really, to speak of, except to reprimand him--that was her way of dealing with it. And so, finally, we went to the Vice President of Student Affairs and talked to the Vice President and [the supervisor] was eventually fired. And we looked at some of the codes, the ethics, and all this kind of questions that came into play, and used those. And I think that they never fired anybody before, so, you know, with us helping them with some of that ammunition...I think that certainly helped out.

In response to a probe about what was being looked for in the codes, the mid-level staff person responded:

> Some of the things...the behavior, I think, that was inappropriate and these were the standards. I can't remember what they were, but these were the standards and this person isn't utilizing, or living up to the standards and he was a NASPA member, too.

It is important to note that in this situation, the staff member and her former colleagues didn't use the code to assist in deciding what to do--they already had decided. The code of ethics was used to insure their desired outcome; it was, in her word, their "ammunition."

For the majority of the focus group participants, referring to a code did not assist them in making their decisions. Members in all of the groups mentioned familiarity with the codes; although for the entry-level and mid-level staff, this was most often limited to reading the codes and then filing them, because "It didn't give any specifics of 'when this, then this'." One member in the entry-level group stated that she specifically referred to her professional code in one "sticky situation" to find some guidelines, but discovered that "the answer's not in there."

A director stated that he also filed away the codes of his profession, but he first read them and weighed the codes against his personal principles:

> I think you have to be aware of them...I can't imagine consulting them in a situation...my model is, I get them, I

> review them, I kind of check them out to see if I'm there. If there's anything on there that looks like, 'wait a second, I've never read that before,' I've got to think about that a minute to see if I agree with that or whatnot, then I kind of check out where I am. But for the most part, pretty congruent with what those codes say. And so, when it comes time to make a decision about how to deal in a crisis situation, I'm comfortable dealing from my own frame of reference, because I've already checked that in, if you will.

The perspective of another director regarding codes was dismissive of his own and his colleagues' personal needs for the codes:

> My sense is that questions we run into in that arena really are more ethical kinds of questions, and I think ethical codes are pretty much at a steady state in the way people conduct their business. I don't think people stay at a department head level or higher very long if they're unethical. And I think most of our professions have ethical codes, and I think most of the department head-type administrators are probably following the ethical codes of their profession. If you're in [name]'s business and you don't follow the ethical codes of her profession, you're not going to be there very long.

The perception that "directors can't survive if they're unethical" was not challenged by any other director. Instead, this comment set the stage for a discussion on the responsibilities of directors to their subordinates to assist in understanding ethics; variations of this discussion topic occurred in the other groups as well. This will be addressed later in this chapter.

While the literature shows that many advocate codes of ethics, most advocates state that a code of ethics *alone* is simply not enough to ensure ethical behavior (Behrman, 1981; Bowman, 1980; Callahan, 1982; Churchill, 1982; Genfan, 1987; Hoffman, 1986; Jones, 1982; Kitchener, 1985; Modic, 1987; Nash, 1981; Pastin, 1986; Richards, 1987; Weber, 1981).

> Few serious observers suffer from the delusion that codes alone will dramatically improve ethical conduct. They do serve, however, as enabling devices to strive for high ideals and as a record of professional consensus. Indeed, a code of practice is inherent in the very concept of professional life. Managers can read the text, ponder its meaning, and develop a

sensitivity and awareness to the values proclaimed therein. Men and women working in organizations that value and nurture a reputation for integrity are the surest safeguard against corruption. Yet, if organizations do nothing more than announce their codes, it will be an abdication of responsibility and an invitation to public cynicism and legislative regulation. (Bowman, 1980, p. 64).

When a code of ethics becomes a "dynamic" document, it can also serve the function of a mission statement. Edwards states that this occurs, in part, when a code of ethics is "transformed" into management tools: training, communication, education (in Otten, 1986, p. 41). Weber (1981) refers to this dynamic transformation as "institutionalizing ethics:"

> The term *institutionalizing ethics* is academic and may sound ponderous, but it has value. It simply means getting ethics formally and explicitly into daily business life, making it a regular and normal part of business. It means putting ethics into company policy making at the board and top management levels and, through a formal code, integrating ethics into all daily decision making and work practices for all employees (Weber, 1981, p. 47).

The literature on codes of ethics sharply contrasts with the experiences of the focus group participants. The notion that codes were "enabling devices" towards higher ideals was not identified as the experience of the participants. Further, codes had not been "institutionalized" into the daily life of the participants, nor were codes "transformed into management tools" by the participants. Therefore, the findings from the focus groups do not pattern the conclusions from the literature about the importance of codes.

<u>The Decision Making Processes as Described by the Participants Reflected Ethical Decision Making Models</u>

In this study, members in all three focus groups suggested that past decisions be reviewed when considering how to solve a problem. An entry-level group member described that in her office, because they were temporarily without a director, she and her colleagues would often "just fall back on 'what did we do before?'." The director's group and the mid-level staff group similarly suggested reliance on past practice as a suitable process for addressing hypothetical case one, asking "how does the school normally handle this?" and to "look at the history of what other decisions had been."

Although this simple process of utilizing past practices may at times be absolutely appropriate, Janis and Mann (1977) caution that because people are reluctant decision makers, they will utilize non-vigilant approaches to decision making, and this often results in ineffective decisions.

The above-mentioned statements were the only times group members articulated a simple, "non-vigilant" process. Predominantly, the focus group participants described thoughtful, "vigilant" decision making processes to explain how they would solve the hypothetical cases. They were especially vigilant in describing real work scenarios.

When probed to suggest what the president should have done in hypothetical case one, an entry-level woman suggested that looking at what had been done in the past was important to do so as to avoid doing it again!

> I don't think coming down hard and quick is the best answer. I think things should be well thought out initially and bringing in people to help and deal with it as an issue would have been better. It would take a little more time, but to act impulsively, so quick and so hard, I just don't think it's right. I think it's the way a lot of students are used to the bureaucracy coming down on them from their own past history--bang, get the kid and get them out of here. I don't think that works.

Her concern about administrators deciding from past history rather than the current situation reflects Nash's model (1981), because the model suggests that,

> a full examination of how the situation occurred and what the traditional solutions have been may reveal a more serious discrepancy of values and pressures, and this will illuminate the real significance and ethics of the problem (p. 83).

Steinem (1987) prescribes a similar caution, since "no ethical decision is exactly transferable from one situation to the next" (p. 62).

The Nash (1981) and Steinem (1987) concerns were also exhibited in the description of the staff decision making processes utilized in the office that was temporarily without a director. Their goal was to provide consistency in decisions made throughout the office:

> Sometimes we did it on our own, but whenever we had a really sticky situation like with a nasty father, something like that, we would tell each other: 'I had this situation, this was what their problem was, and I did this.' So, sometimes we'd hold them after and other times we'd go before, depending on how disastrous the situation could become...It was never the same way twice, but it worked. We got through. We've been without a director since April. It hasn't been easy though.

This process includes an additional guideline of Steinem's: "there is a human and humane principle called simple fairness" (1987, p. 63).

A mid-level staff person described that when making decisions in his job,

> I have to use the university system lawyer because I deal with a lot of Maine state laws and I have to call up and consult people in the community like fire marshalls, and things like that...I know I use the NACA ethic laws..."

This is representative of Kitchener's three-part model, which states in part one that "the first line of ethical defense consists of professional rules and codes of ethics" (1985, p. 18).

Part one of Kitchener's model (1985) was articulated by an entry-level staff person as well, with regard to the established operations of her office:

> There is that gray area where we have professional judgement to make adjustments. And that's more when we tend to go to the encyclopedia or other publications. But usually before we do anything, we need to go to the director or bring it up in a staff meeting to talk about it. [When asked if that helps, she replied:] Yes. A lot. Because ultimately the responsibility for our judgment falls back on our director, and when the auditor comes, she is the one that would have to say this is why we did this and be able to back it up. So, her feeling is for anything out of the ordinary, talk about it with your peers; look up the rules and regulations; come to me with what you want to do and why. She'll be the ultimate one to say it's okay, go with it or no, because it is her that ultimately takes responsibility for the auditors of what we did and there's money involved. If we do something they don't like, we're going to lose federal money.

A relatively new director shared the following when asked if anyone would like to describe a real situation. She explained a conflict between two groups of people in her office: "disparate is a very mild word." One group is "very human caring" and the other is "incredibly rules-oriented." The two leaders of the factions almost came to blows around one situation:

> I made a decision that I was going to make these two people confront each other, and talk through why they made the decision they made in this particular situation. And it was a little tense in my office, but there I had these two people sitting across from each other, and I was facilitating a discussion between the two of them about their differences. I don't know that it did anything...I don't know if it really really helped. But what I ended up coming to conclusion with was, 'Gang, we're here with a main mission, and in order for us to get there, we need to be in this together,' and explained that I need <u>your</u> type and I need <u>your</u> type. I mean, I need these two different types of people in my office, one to keep us human and the other one to keep the paper flowing...I realized about twenty minutes into it that we weren't going to get anywhere, this maybe wasn't the best idea I ever came up with. And, I ended by concluding, just as I said summarizing saying, 'Okay, I hope that you have gotten some insight into how each other thinks.' And my decision was that this kind of picking at each other, you know, because you disagree with the way that someone thinks, has

got to stay out of the office. What we need to do is keep focused on the fact that we have a common mission, and we need to get to it without the picking between each other.

Her decision making process reflects several prescriptions from the literature. For example, the Blanchard and Peale "Ethics Check" (1988, p. 27) incorporates the question "How will it make me feel about myself?" as essential to review. Blanchard and Peale also state the importance of "purpose" as a principle for ethical behavior. For individuals, this means to be "always able to face the mirror;" (p. 80) and for organizations, it means that "the mission of our organization is communicated from the top" (p. 125). As one of her fellow directors commented:

> I think, [name], what you did, which was very good is...you're asking those people to be bigger people. You're asking them to forget about their garbage and look at the mission and, you know, be part of the team. And I think people need to be challenged like that; they need to remember...that people have differences.

Another model represented in this actual decision making process is Nash's (1981), since it addresses the questions "how would you define the problem if you stood on the other side of the fence?" (p. 81) and "to whom and to what do you give your loyalty as a person and as a member of the corporation?" (p. 84).

A mid-level staff person shared a very serious dilemma he confronted at a previous institution. He had informed his boss in writing of his concerns about basketball players allegedly being involved in drug dealing. He had written because:

> I was very concerned that...when the bust finally happened...that they were going to say that I knew all about it...and that I was going to get in trouble. So I wrote a letter being very specific about what I knew, about the fact that the R.A.s had informed me of this and it was all hearsay...listed the names that I was aware of...specified that it was hearsay,

and suggested that we notify the Police that they should...start doing some investigation into it.

His boss gave the letter to the person temporarily supervising the police, who responded: "I want you to hide this letter. I don't want anybody else to see it and I want you to talk with each one of these students individually about their drug problem."

> ...And I said, 'I don't think I can do that. There's no way that I can contact these students. It's all hearsay and if I contact them, I will be in more difficulty than if I don't...then if you call on somebody else.' They said they didn't want anything else to happen and I said, 'I can't live with that and unless you give me a specific letter in writing instructing me that as my supervisor, you are telling me to contact each and every one of these students individually and have a meeting with them, I won't do it.' So I got the letter and I ended up talking with them and I took the original letter and sealed it and taped it and sent it to me directly/return receipt/kept it sealed and signed and all that stuff just in case anything would happen. And there was a really dangerous situation that I had to resolve by requesting specific instructions to keep myself and the school covered...I needed to get the information to somebody else because it was not information that I could handle. There was nothing that I could do at my level, yet it needed to be done on another level and I needed to get it to that level so that somebody else could make a decision.

The processes this staff person followed are represented in the first five of the six steps in Jones' Rational Model of Ethical Analysis and Decisionmaking (1982):

> Step one: State the ethical dilemma in plain language.
> Step two: Identify relevant facts, ranking them in order of significance.
> Step three: Identify relevant values.
> Step four: List alternative courses of action.
> Step five: Rank predictable consequences in terms of certain harmful or beneficial effects..
> Step six: Adopt a proactive posture and propose a policy or institutional arrangement for preventing this kind of ethical dilemma from reoccurring. This is the issue of anticipatory ethics. (Jones, 1982)

This staff person managed step six by leaving the institution!

To What Extent is an Ethic of Caring Utilized?

In Chapter II, the review of the literature, an ethic of justice is contrasted with an ethic of caring. An ethic of caring is ethical behavior born of a moral attitude. It requires an understanding of the context of the situation, implies an orientation toward others, and focuses on relationships and responsibilities (Gilligan, 1982; Noddings, 1984). "Situational ethics" require an ethic of caring as a foundation, because of the need to understand the context in which a dilemma occurs (Steinem, 1987).

The purpose of this study was not to "prove" one paradigm of ethics as better than the other, but to provide, through dialogue, the opportunity for demonstrations of an ethic of caring in use. The nature of group dialogue and the consequent inability to discuss with individual participants has made it difficult to obtain a clear answer to this question. However, at different times throughout the three focus group discussions, participants discussed ethical considerations that appeared to arise from moral attitudes rather than from more traditional moral reasoning. The identified considerations seemed to pay special attention to context, community, and relationships. This section takes up these issues in turn.

Context

The need to understand the context of the situation, to "see the bigger picture," was cited in all of the focus groups. It is noteworthy that in all situations in which this was suggested, the rationale was to assist the decision maker, rather than improve the decision. Focus group participants especially recommended the need to "step back" in emotionally charged situations. Comments regarding the first hypothetical situation illustrate this:

Entry-level:

> I don't like this 'deal with it quick' type of attitude...it is emotional; it's too quick. You can't really think completely objectively when you deal with a sticky situation quick and put it under the carpet. It is oftentimes very subjective.

Mid-level:

> I think when issues like this come up, it's really important that the administration, whoever is in charge of making that decision, take some time to process. Because you might be so inclined to react, you know, right away, versus looking at all the facts. It's so easy to jump into something like that, that you should take the time to sit back...

Director-level:

> I think sometimes there's a tendency not just at a university but in all kinds of places that you get on a bandwagon...I just, I think you owe it to yourself to really think through that process and make sure that you are doing it for the right reasons as opposed to being on, taking on a cause for the wrong issue.

A mid-level staff person stated that "perspective" was what was needed in hypothetical case two, and suggested the following intervention:

> If another person was to be brought in to help mediate the situation...seems as if people are really looking at it really black and white...You know, they're looking at it very narrowly and if they could have somebody else come in and that person could help them, you know, put things into perspective, then maybe each one of them could give a little bit...they get tunnel vision.

The context of a situation is understood in accordance with the perspective held. In the mid-level focus group, one participant expressed that the perspective one has is a function of "whether you're looking at the end product or whether you're looking at how you process getting to it." The focus group members explained that sometimes the departments in the division conflict on which perspective is more important: the process or the product. The "process/product" tension was described at times in the other groups as well. It is a typical tension in most organizations.

Community

Directors were more likely than entry- or mid-level staff to re-frame situations within a group or community perspective. As the student affairs staff with the most experience and training, this "educational" approach would be expected. This may have also occurred because the term "community concept" was introduced by one director at the beginning of the group discussion. As often happens in focus groups, participants are stimulated by the comments of others, and will utilize the words introduced by other participants as well as respond to the train of thought of others.

When the directors group introduced themselves, they spoke of what they like most and least of their jobs as student affairs professionals. This produced a discussion about the mission of their campus. Thinking about the University's mission caused one director to harken back to the past:

> When I first came here it was a single institution and that community concept was there. And I don't think you can beat that. When you look at the school now, a lot is different. But I think that presents a little bit of that problem in terms of that unity and community concept.

Later in the discussion, when the directors addressed the first hypothetical situation, (prank suicide), the community theme returned. A few of the directors stated "I think that it needs to be handled in a community." The need for this approach was described as follows:

> What this student has done [has] affected the other residents, the other students in the residence hall. Kicking the student off campus is not at all going to make any of those amends. It's not going to have the student go back and rethink 'what is

it I did, and how might I have affected other people,' and taught them how to deal with these feelings that they have. Or the next time before they pull a prank, they'll think it through--'Is this going to hurt other people?'

A mid-level staff person also suggested addressing this hypothetical case from a community perspective, but for another reason, to maximize on potential peer pressure:

> If the students are incensed enough, they're going to deal with it on their own if you educate them to be incensed...it's a community issue.

Although this may not seem particularly "caring," the perspective that this is a community issue for the students has its foundation in the literature. As Steinem states: "The people with the most ethical right and responsibility to make a decision are the people who will be affected by it" (1987, p. 63).

The concept of "group development" was introduced by a new director in the directors focus group. She applied group theory as a way to understand the problems in hypothetical case two:

> Maybe there's another perspective on this group, too, that this might be just part of a natural development of this team. It might be just a development phase they are going through...It might not necessarily be a bad thing that's happening. I think maybe part of the way to work with this is to maybe have them air their views more <u>in</u> the group and have the rest of the group talk about...'how can we get these people back into the group' or 'how can the group work with these other people' or something. Instead of having George have to be the one person to say 'no' all the time. Maybe say, well if we're going to remain as a team maybe to keep other people's opinions in the forefront. He might be getting more support than he knows about.

Because she introduced the application of group development theory as a way to assess this situation, other staff used that line of thinking to express how they'd behave if they were on the hypothetical staff of the same case. One said:

I'd like to think I'm busy enough so I am just going to ignore it and stay away from him...Because I think they're bad news!

Another disagreed, however:

> But I'm afraid if there's dissent in this little group, that it's going to affect the rest of the office. Everybody going to know. You're not going to be able to just go on and do your work unless you withdraw from the team. Because it's part of the team that's having that....

The next speaker agreed with the person who wanted to ignore the situation:

> And as a new player in that group, you're going to be very confused about what's going on, because you don't have that history, you don't understand. I would do what [first person] did and go in my office.

That person responded:

> Actually, if the truth be known, I'm probably in that group...I think seriously, though, we all play different roles in groups. I think some of us are more of the fighters and some of us are more the harmonizers. And I typically am more the harmonizer, so I want to fit in. So, I would probably be a part of that group...I might get caught up in it sometimes, but at other times I'd say, 'Wait a second, I'm not comfortable with what we're doing.' So, I would probably be trying to work to pull everybody back together, if I were part of this group. I could see myself getting caught up in it, because that is where the excitement is, to be honest. That's where the new ideas are circulating. That's where everybody's feeling excited. I like that, so I want to be a part of that nucleus. At the same time, I am going to feel a little uncomfortable if we get too far down the wrong road and not connected to the institution.

The use of a community or group perspective was used with regard to understanding actual situations as well. When the director who had shared her handling of a difficult staff confrontation was asked how things have since "panned out," she said:

> What has happened is it's gone underground. I mean, it is not happening in front of me anymore, it's not happening there. But it was strange, because some of the people that were most positively affected by it were not even involved in the

> confrontation. A couple of people on the staff did decide they needed to be bigger...a couple of my staff members really came back to me and said, 'You know, I really realize I'm being just a little petty; I'm being a little small.'

Relationships

An earlier section of this chapter focused on participant considerations of responsibilities in decision making processes. This section identifies the considerations in maintaining relationships.

The concern of maintaining a relationship is illustrated clearly in this dialogue between two entry-level staff members, regarding the dean's behavior in hypothetical case one (prank suicide):

> I think the Dean put the hall director in a bad position...As long as things are going along fine, great. When anything goes wrong, like you know, we can all think of cases where things are done and somebody from higher up says to their subordinates who have people below them, 'Deal with it.' And that's it, they have to deal with it right then, because they have somebody breathing down their back waiting for it to be resolved. In this case, I really feel for the hall director, because his or her job is to have order in the dorms, and have people not acting up. It's a difficult situation in that case because the Dean is their boss and they have to go along with it...I think the hall director does need to be as integrally a part of that decision as ever.
>
> I agree except that the Dean is the one who is finally accountable, and that there has to be that open communication between those professionals that they are fighting for the same thing. I guess what has to happen is that because the decision was made so abruptly that the hall director has to go with the boss, at least for the public. Then, personally, I guess for myself I would definitely address the Dean on my own, in a private room, for the purpose of the students involved. They need to maybe have time before making a decision to talk between the hall director and the Dean to come up with something they can all digest and then hit the floor with it. The Dean and the hall director do need to be together on it.

A mid-level staff person thought the concern of the president in the same case should focus on the *relationship* of the dean and the president:

[As president, I would] let the Dean of Students share with me how he or she felt about the incident. First of all, maybe process that a little bit with them, then process the decision that they made that night and ask them if they feel as if there were some loopholes. And then hopefully, they can take some ownership on the lack of due process and then perhaps consider alternative sanctions.

Entry-level and mid-level participants also expressed concern about the potential damage to the staff relationships in hypothetical case two. In the following example, the word "responsibility" is used. The intention, however, is clear:

[The gossip is] always a lose-lose situation. And for some reason, people can't understand that...I also think that it's the responsibility, though, of those people--the supervisor and the co-workers--to be approachable for that feedback, too; so I see it as a two-way kind of responsibility being involved there.

Regarding the miscommunication between George and his staff in hypothetical case two, one woman suggested: "maybe they just feel that they've been heard but not listened to." She suggested that George should *explain* why he doesn't like the suggestions of his staff, and stated: "He should talk about his reasoning." Another participant said:

If he's got confidence in them, and these are the type of people he's handpicked himself, then my feeling is he needs to do a little compromising and maybe let some of his people try something.

It is important to note that the expressed concern of the maintenance of the relationships in the hypothetical cases occurred only in the mid- and entry-level groups, and were articulated only by women.

An ethic of caring suggests that a decision flows out of the context of the situation, and attends to the relationships within. This orientation was represented in the focus group interviews at times by the types of concerns and perspectives provided by the participants.

Does the Focus Group Forum Contribute to Developing a Campus Environment which Promotes Dialogue on Ethical Decision Making?

According to the literature on focus group research, participants in focus group interviews influence one another by their responses to ideas and comments made during the discussion (Krueger, 1988). The literature on ethical decision making suggests the importance of group dialogue as part of the process of making ethical decisions (Cahn, 1989; Fried, 1988; Waters, 1988). This section examines whether focus group interviews on a college campus help promote dialogue, and therefore help develop an appropriate environment for ethical decision making.

Of the four research questions which guided this study, this is the only question which was directly asked in the moderator's guide: "has this discussion been valuable to you?" The subsequent probes were: "please explain why or why not," "is this something you've done before?" and "has discussing this *as a staff* been valuable?" This line of questioning was included in the event that none of the participants reflected on the interview methodology itself.

The data collected to address this research question represent statements made during the interviews as well as the written comments from the follow-up questionnaires, administered one month after the interviews. These data will be addressed in turn.

Comments Regarding the Value of the Dialogue

Participants in all of the focus groups directly mentioned the impact that the focus group discussions had on them, even before this moderator's question was specifically asked. The types of statements made by the participants regarding their involvement in the discussions indicated that they valued the opportunity to talk to one another, that they were both supported by and supporting of one another, and that the dialogue allowed the opportunity for reflection on the issues. Representative comments include: "I want your input," "I learned from you," "I support you," and "This process makes me reflect on my own behavior."

The majority of the comments made regarding the focus groups were specific to appreciating the opportunity for dialogue and sharing among colleagues. When the focus group of directors was asked to share real work situations, a new director introduced her situation by stating: "it would be good to hear your perspectives on how I dealt with it." Further, after explaining her office problem, she ended with: "I'm anxious, I mean, I'm very curious as to how...other managers would have dealt with the situation."

The desire for the input of others was also articulated in the entry-level group when a work situation was introduced: "I have one I'll ask you folks because you are all different."

Focus group participants acknowledged that they were learning new things from each other as a result of the discussions. After one mid-level focus group participant explained a problem in her office, and how it had affected the morale of that office, another focus group member responded with: "that's interesting that you would say that, because that has been the feeling in *our* office." They then discussed their situations, and concluded that what was needed in both offices was "greater understanding" among the staff.

Within the director's focus group, after the new director had shared her work problem, another new director remarked that she, too, had a similar staff problem, and that she hadn't been sure whether to proceed with her plan for dealing with it: "but listening to [name] makes me think that maybe that would be a good idea."

Hearing the newer staff talk so frankly about office problems caused one veteran director to remark:

> I always have a hard time with that issue, like, in terms of sorting out how much time do you spend on...just getting on with the agenda...and how much do you stop, take time out, and spend time talking about staff issues and staff relationships? Because I'm convinced that I'm never going to solve anything in my office. And that's probably the area I feel the most incompetent in and the most frustrated in and get the least yardage out of, is dealing with some of those unresolvable issues.

The fact that this dialogue among the directors was so candid reflects that the necessary criteria for creating a supportive campus environment was present: modeling, asking questions, and disclosing perspectives and beliefs (Fried, 1988).

The focus group discussions facilitated other comments of self-disclosure from the director's group as well: "I know I could do a lot better with my department...to have these kinds of discussions," and:

> Every time I get in a group, I learn something about myself and I learn something about how other people are doing a job. And I can choose from the things I hear and what I would like to use in my program, and how I do my job. And that is really helpful to me. And I am a touchy feely sort, very liberal, and all those things, so I need to hear the other side a lot.

The focus group dialogues provided the opportunity for comments of personal support in response to individual disclosures, for example: "I like your idea," "I like the way you did that," and "I think what you did was very good."

The responses to the specific focus group question, "has this discussion been valuable to you," were overwhelmingly affirmative. Many of the responses were specific to the value of the process. A discussion in the mid-level focus group illustrated that the process assisted in reinforcing judgements:

> I think any time you reflect on something that you may do quite automatically, it's very beneficial. I don't think we have much time in our daily lives to go back and think about the process of our decision making and I think any time you're asked to reflect on something, certainly for me, I think it's very beneficial.
>
> I guess it was interesting for me going into different people's shoes...And I think that's really good because I think it shows that we're really growing and developing as a Student Affairs division and it makes me feel good to be part of that.

Within the entry-level group, the primary value of the process identified by the participants was the opportunity to meet one another: "Now I have names *and* faces." Additionally, participants in the entry-level group liked knowing that problems are shared: "that you are not the only office dealing with that problem student or that problem in general."

In response to the question of the value of the focus group discussion, one entry-level participant expressed a yearning for similar opportunities in the future:

> I was hoping that at some point there would be meetings...some way of bringing us all together. I guess we couldn't do it all in one meeting, but a way in which we could share our perspectives on a given problem...It's incredible what you learn about yourself, about your colleagues, about relating and new dimensions to a situation. I learned today that I guess I am more conservative than I thought I was. With things like this. I surprised myself. So that was good.

When specifically asked if they had ever done this as a group before, one veteran director attempted to speak for everyone, saying "Yes, we have."

He was then rebuffed, as the following exchange indicates:

> I don't know if I see it quite the way [name] does. I think that maybe that's longevity and you've seen more of that occur. I think for me, I haven't seen as much of that occur. I think I've probably been more guarded about my own shop, if you will. I've kept some of those issues more internal. I think I've checked them out with people around this room at different times, but not in this form. And I'd have to think about that, I guess, to know whether I'd want to do that a whole lot.

Another responds:

> I, yeah, I agree with that. I think there's a tendency to find it easy to talk about positive things and things that end as positive, and we're starting to do a little bit more of that latter, addressing things that aren't as positive. But I don't think that we've done a lot of it either.

Perhaps in an effort to smooth over the differences of opinion, a third director said:

> I think over the years that the format has changed a lot...and I think that we've changed a lot in terms of the department...I think we're more compatible now.

Prior to this exchange, the directors hadn't engaged in any kind of disagreement. After this exchange, however, participants wanted to make sure that their differences of opinion were heard.

The only participant (of all three groups) who stated “no” when asked if the discussion was valuable was the director who had earlier tried to speak for everyone. He gave his response immediately after the above exchange, and for the following reasons:

> I left a situation that's got 'major crisis' written all over it when I came over here. And today, at this point in time with what's happening across the street I'd rather not be here. But, that's, you know, we all get caught up in the heat of battle, and I think that's one of the problems we have, my 'zoo day' is tomorrow.

After this statement, another veteran director, in stating that she did find it useful, again stated (very gently) that this type of discussion *was* new, and valuable, for the group, but that the timing of the focus group interview made it difficult:

> It was helpful for me...we have never done this, I don't think, in the group...what I value about, say, a group like this, is that I tend to be a little bit like the emotional dean. I want to jump in and fix it right away, and I need people to say, 'Okay, let's think about this. Let's step back and go through the process a little bit.' And so...I do this individually - go out to people. And I need somebody to help me through that. So, I very rarely, if it's a big issue, sort it out totally by myself. I think that's a positive, and so I would love to have more discussions at a lot less busy time.

It is possible that the style of the exchanges among the directors illustrates a change in their group norms. Throughout the focus group, the directors made mention of the differences between the new and old directors. It was even clear to the researcher, an outsider, who was old and who was new by the type of comments they would make. Although all of the directors showed support and respect for one another, the "groupings" appeared to be among the old, and among the new. The above rebut, however, came from an old member, to an old member! This kind of direct disagreement in a group setting, even though it was polite, appeared to be new for the group. The fact that the disagreeing comment came from another "old member" provided the support for the others, including the new directors, to speak candidly as well.

Statements Regarding the Focus Groups Made After the Discussions

The goal of the follow-up questionnaire was to assess what impact the focus group had had on the actions and thoughts of the participants. One month after the focus group interviews, participants were mailed a survey with open-ended questions which asked them to respond to the same questions asked during the focus groups: had the discussion been of value, and had the fact that they participated as a staff been of value. Additionally, they were asked if they had utilized group discussion to facilitate decision making in the past month, and if the answer was attributed to the focus group discussions. Finally, they were given an opportunity to add any comments. They were not asked to identify themselves on the questionnaire, although approximately one-third of the respondents did.

Thirteen of the 26 questionnaires were returned; a 50% response rate. Overall, the gathered written data reflected what was said during the focus group interviews. Participants appreciated the opportunity to hear different perspectives on problem solving and decision making, to see that other departments had problems, too, and to network with colleagues. Quite a few remarked with amazement that so many people shared similar reactions to the hypothetical situations.

A number of participants remarked that the discussions provided the opportunity to examine values--departmental and personal. Working as a staff was seen as valuable because it was a way in which people could join forces, and work towards a common goal. Others mentioned that the focus group was a way to gain an appreciation for the larger picture of the university. Some examples of written comments include:

> I found it to be very interesting. It was of value because it illustrated techniques that might be different from my own in solving problems and in working with the staff.

> It helped clarify what other folks from other departments think; how other departments treat their staff; what overall values they hold. This was of immense importance to me in putting the values of the division into perspective.

> I found the discussion valuable for a number of reasons. It was the type of discussion our group rarely has, but probably should. It was apparent to me that as a group we were fairly congruent with our values...I also think the discussion serves to help each of us as individuals recommit ourselves to maintaining ethical standards. By talking about it, one is reminded of how important it is. I couldn't help but wonder what the difference would have been if our supervisor had been present.

With regard to whether the participants utilized group discussion to facilitate decision making within the past month, and whether such intervention could be attributed to the focus group, many answered that they had always used group decision making in staff meetings. Some answered just "no." However, one third of the respondents did see the focus groups as an intervention, as these two responses indicate:

> I have built group discussions into my staff meetings on a more regular basis. I also plan to do some collaborative work with other staffs. Yes, the discussion we had as a staff reminded me how helpful and effective group discussion can be as a means to forming consensus and direction. I have historically done that with student groups and in committee work. We are now giving it greater emphasis as a staff. Thanks.

> I use group discussion to facilitate decision as a matter of course. Our group discussion last month reinforced my belief in the value of that process.

One of the 13 responses could be described as "negative," in that the comments were "boring, nothing different" regarding the value of the group discussion. This same respondent was the only one to write "no" to the question regarding the value of participating with other staff in the focus group.

The responses to the questionnaire indicate that the participants perceived their experiences in the same manner over time. Thus, the overwhelming majority enjoyed the focus groups, and even after one month, the participants felt it had been a valuable occasion.

It seems, therefore, that the focus group interview can be a valuable intervention for a campus. It can help produce an environment which is conducive to dialogue on important matters and in which considerations of ethics are allowed to emerge from the discussion, can be deliberated and developed through group discussion, and are perceived as valuable.

Fried (1988) has suggested that it is student affairs staff who can promote a campus environment where questions are asked and dialogue ensues. Through these focus group discussions, the student affairs participants asked questions, participated in dialogue, and disclosed their perspectives and beliefs with their colleagues. This type of discussion *within* student affairs is a first step towards promoting such dialogues in the larger campus environment, and therefore towards developing an appropriate environment for ethical decision making.

Additional Findings

During each focus group interview, the extent to which the participants identified the importance of considering organizational issues when making decisions was particularly noteworthy. The specific organizational considerations identified were organizational missions, organizational responsibilities, and the consideration of the influence of others within the organization.

These findings on organizational issues relate to the literature on ethics in a more general way than the findings on ethical codes and ethical decision making models. However, these organizational considerations are seen as important because the focus group participants were more familiar with organizational development literature than with the literature on ethical codes and models. It appears that their awareness of organizational literature and organizational missions and responsibilities allowed ethical considerations to emerge in the discussions.

The Participants Referred to Mission Statements to Guide Action

Mission statements have the ability to guide action and establish the tone of an organization's climate. According to Blanchard and Peale (1988), an organizational mission guides "values, hopes, and a vision that helps us to determine what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior" (p. 125). In all three groups, the student affairs professionals referred to missions, and specified three different levels of missions: institutional, divisional, and departmental. It is important to note that the participants found mission statements to be of greater importance than codes.

Participants considered institutional mission and values to be extremely important. When a mid-level staff person identified as one of the problems with the behavior of the staff in hypothetical case one the fact that no one sat back to consider "what kind of example am I setting if I'm doing something unethical?" her colleague responded with: "we *are* role models and no matter how we teach them...I mean, they pick up on when we lie to them, and the institution certainly sets the values that we'd like the students to pick up." This exemplifies an understanding that institutional values are implied through behavior, regardless of whether the behavior exhibited supports or undermines the mission.

A director also questioned whether the behavior of the staff in hypothetical case one matched the mission of the institution:

> You also have to come back to the fact that this is an educational institution. And what is it you're trying to teach? It's not a penal institution where you're trying to punish. I think punishment is a piece of education, and it has an

> appropriate place as an educational tool, but I don't think it's an end in and of itself. And there's a lot of educational potential going on in this situation.

This same director was the only staff person who introduced the concept of partnership with academic departments in the mission of higher education. A typical perception of student affairs staff is that academic affairs misperceives the value of student affairs. This common perception was identified by many of the directors as a frustration. Others, however, acknowledged this as being understandable, and cited as evidence the fact that academic departments have more in common with peers at other institutions than with student affairs professionals on the same campus. They noted that formal structures rarely join the "two factions" together. In the course of the discussion, the director again returned to the idea of a collaborative mission:

> Well my ideal would be that we all value the education mission of the institution and we all work towards that. And we're all equal partners in that, with equal respect for each other's input...And sometimes I work from that assumption and then I rudely am awakened to the fact that that's not the assumption held by everybody else within an institution like this. And I think that's frustrating. Because I think we have a great deal to offer that's directly related to the educational mission of the institution. But in fact, we have to work extra hard to have people realize that it's important. Does that make sense?

The divisional mission was also considered important by participants. The Student Affairs Vice Presidency of the University of Southern Maine was established less than two years ago. All of the groups mentioned the establishment of the division, and recognized that the organizational change brought a new means of relationship. Two members of the mid-level focus group entered into an animated conversation of the impact the Vice President's mission on their departments, their colleagues, and themselves. The first began:

> One of [V.P.]'s goals is overlapping and utilizing everyone's resources...but what that came with was not a lot of preparation in how to deal with a lot of those feelings people would feel about people going into those different areas of ownership--

His colleague provided reinforcement with: "That's right."

The first continued:

> --and creative criticism...[but] how do people deal with that? There wasn't a lot of, I don't know, preparing for that. The preparing was well, 'This is what we're going to do now,' you know, and...

The colleague interjected: "Deal with it!", meaning there was a lack of preparation and procedures for the change.

The first continued:

> Yes...and some people were used to that and [office], of course, we're very used to that because we're a resource for departments that might not have that student contact all the time....we've *always* overlapped, but a lot of people that we came into contact with--and sometimes we're a little overwhelming--and sometimes that can be real threatening to some people or we just might be overly obnoxious (laughs) that way. And then some of the styles of all the different Directors are *so* different in this university that they might throw us into something that we're very much responsible for, yet, we have [to] deal with decisions from other people whose styles are *so* much different from us...

To a request for a specific example from the moderator, this person said:

> Like for [office], sometimes...a lot of times we have to make decisions that are immediate because we're on deadlines and there's other departments that put deadlines on publications and stuff like that...that we have to get a brochure out and stuff like that. And I might go to [name] (laughs) and I'd say, '[name], I need to know all about this, but I need to know it real quick'...because I'm thinking deadline, publications and my Director's thinking, 'got to get that brochure out for the

> Freshmen in the Fall,' and I have all these other people saying, 'I need this and it's all set to go out at a certain time,' but [name] says, 'I don't feel real comfortable in making a lot of these decisions because I want lots of process in this because these are decisions that are going to make...you know...And my supervisor may say, 'Well, that's important, but if we don't get a lot of feedback right now, that's not the important issue.' The important issue might be to get that [publication] out.

The colleague summarized the situation: "Beat the deadline."

The group then continued this discussion by acknowledging that their overarching mission had changed when they moved from an acting dean to the new vice president. The conversation continued:

> I think the goal of the Acting Dean was to maintain the institution or maintain the department or the division in whatever role it was in and not go in any directions, but keep it together while he was here until a permanent person could come in, and he did a fabulous job at that.
>
> Of course. That's what an "acting" does.
>
> Right. There's no doubt about it. But then for three years we're like, you know, rolling and rolling and just treading water. Then, all of a sudden, we get a leader. A leader who comes up with the goals and now all of a sudden, we've got to work together to meet the goals. It's going fairly well...there's a little bit of friction. Friction's important, though.
>
> And I think that's what kept us all together was like the mission statement and seeing the foresight of the benefits of that cause. We all worked in institutions where we bought into that before and stuff like that.
>
> But it was chaotic and it was difficult. People had to look at what some of the real issues were and I think [V.P.] really tried to move us to a Student Affairs model. And I think it was difficult for some people to accept that because they weren't familiar with it....that they hadn't been trained in it. You know, some of us--I agree with you [to person who just spoke]--some of us *have* been, but I don't think that *all* of us have been and I think that made it real difficult. You know, I've talked to [V.P.]. I think we need to do some more training. Certainly, I could use some more in Student Personnel. I didn't major in Student Personnel. But I think some people need to buy into it, but they need to *learn* about it first and understand, you know,

> how Admissions can work with *my* office or work with some other office and you know, vice versa.

The theoretical importance of the divisional mission and its practical significance were integrated in the following statement:

> Maybe some people don't buy into this stuff...but I can buy into why we have to do immunization; I can buy into why we have a problem with doing the Greeks traditions because I really try, like you know, we're on a mission and I think that [V.P.] has really set that up for us...that's what I got out of that breakfast, anyway...is trying to buy into some of our goals and missions. So I think that it's real important to keep sight of that whenever we have to work with each other and other departments. And as much as we haven't had a lot of practice in doing that--interacting and confronting each other--I can always be talked into something if I think it's really benefitting students in general and in some of the missions of the education process and what we're trying to do with students. But I think part of the problem was that we got all these goals, and we got this mission and then people had to work with each other and we just weren't used to doing that...we just weren't used to having to deal with other departments.

This extensive dialogue of members of the mid-level focus group is included because it illustrates the impact of a divisional mission on decision making processes, particularly in establishing a new organizational unit. The dialogue was also illuminating because of the unique organizational perspective of the mid-level staff members. As mid-level staff, they often reflect on their entry-level training and experiences in making decisions, and apply it "upward" towards understanding directors and organizational structures.

Hoffman (in Brown, 1987), remarks that "ethical people can be brought down by serving in a bad organization, just as people with questionable ethical integrity can be uplifted, or at least held in check, by serving in a good one" (p. 50). This is because people don't operate in a vacuum. "They gain meaning, direction and purpose by belonging to and acting out of organizations, out of social cultures that are formed around common goals, shared beliefs and collective duties" (Brown, 1987, p. 50).

> The nature of the moral corporate culture is the key. It must be created in such a way that definite ethical goals, structures, and strategies are clearly put forward to form a conceptual and operational framework for moral decision making. It must make clear to all its individual members that it values and will not tolerate any deviation from a moral point of view. But at the same time, this moral culture, which gives meaning, identity, and integrity to the whole corporate collective, must also value and encourage the moral autonomy of each of its individual members. (Hoffman, 1986, p. 241).

The importance of having a departmental mission was articulated in all of the groups. One director stated his mission when describing what he likes the best about his job:

> The thing I like best about the job is trying to fulfill our mission of being one of the best [service] in New England and I think we're moving in that direction.

In the discussion of hypothetical case two, all of the groups identified the need to know if a mission had been established and articulated in the career services department. Participants considered this necessary information for discussing decision options to address hypothetical case two. From the entry-level group:

> I think he [George] is going to need to share some goals, and they need to look at the direction that they are going. I think that the thing that got me was they want to pursue their own particular interests, and what are those interests and is it something that can actually help them? Let's look at the goals and see how they, how pursuing those interests may help the department at...a larger, a bigger picture. But it sounds like George has something on his agenda and they have another agenda all together.

> It's hard to tell when the fabric started coming apart. We need a team spirit, a unified kind of approach, and a philosophy of the office that hopefully is present at every meeting, present throughout the day, and present throughout the year. So if people go off a bit, need to be compromised with, in some way

kept in the fold at least. These folks shut right off, hard to tell if it is George's fault not keeping that team focus, or that team spirit going, or whether these people are actually being a little bit more rebellious than they need be...As a director, his mission is consistent with the mission of the institution, then he has to get his people to agree to that. You have to have a team all working from the same approach, the approach of the director. I hate to sound rigid in that way, but I do believe and want to believe that we are all working in a division of someone whose way of going about meeting the goals of the office we believe in. And I want to work with that person. If it comes, that someone wants to do something completely different than what is going to help meet those goals, that's a problem. That's the problem for the director, and it might be a problem for the employees, if they can't fit it in within this mission.

The same thoughts were evident in the director's group as well:

> I think people like to have responsibility and authority...and the manager can give them authority and responsibility in areas that fit in with the mission of the office, the mission of the university.
>
> I think it connects to what kind of a staff environment you are creating. How do you make joint decisions, who has veto power, and how do you deal with dissent? Can you come back to the staff and say, the fact that you didn't get these things you wanted to do, how is it affecting our work level? How is it affecting our work environment? You try and make those issues as part of the discussion.

The concerns raised by this director mirror the areas suggested by Sashkin (1984) as ethical imperatives in employee participation: setting goals, making decisions, solving problems, and making changes in the organization (1984). Such participation “fulfills three basic human work needs: increased autonomy, increased meaningfulness, and decreased isolation” (Sashkin, 1984, p. 11).

When asked how they would respond to hypothetical case two if they were in George's (the director's) position, all of the men in the entry- and mid-level groups said that George should check out his mission with his boss and his peers, and if his boss still supports it, the staff should get in line, or leave. One man got very specific in his response:

> Depending on the relationship with George and the supervisor, and what kind of a supervisor he has, if I were George, the first thing I would do is go to my supervisor and say, 'You know what my program is. I think it's functional; I think it's working well. I have...these staff asked me to make directional changes like this that I don't agree with. Do they need to be changed? Do we need to go in that direction? I need some advice from you. Let's hash it out'...hashing that out...making a decision as to whether there needs to be some specific changes or perhaps whether they *don't* need to be changed. If they *do* need to be changed, and George doesn't like those changes, then George has an obligation or *I* have an obligation to go someplace else and find a place where I can be happy. If they're *not* going to be changed, and then everything is meeting his needs, then the people who are discontent there need to either become content and be able to live with that or go someplace else. And this is where I differ very greatly from a traditional Student Affairs person...I've come up on this a number of times...even in my own situation, is that I think everybody is hired for a specific need at a specific time and people change and learn to do different things for different reasons. But when one is hired, one's hired to do that. If that is no longer needed, then it's time to change and go on to a new person to do what *can* be done and perhaps *you* can change...perhaps the *needs* can change around that.

This man exhibited a position that serving the mission is even more important than supporting the changing needs of the staff within the organization. As he said, this is not a typical student affairs perspective.

Neither was it typical of what women group members had to say. Many of the women, although in agreement with the need to "check it out with the boss," suggested that George should nevertheless have tried to accommodate some of the needs of the staff, as well as examine his own leadership style. They saw this as a *responsibility* of George, as the supervisor. Identifying responsibilities of supervisors occurred often in the focus groups, as the following section indicates.

Thus, it was clear that the participants in all three focus groups saw mission as critically important. Further, the focus group participants connected the concept of "mission" in specific ways to ethical decision making.

The Organizational Responsibilities of the Supervisor Were Considered When Making Decisions

As much as the decision making processes of these student affairs professionals are influenced by the "ethos" of their work, as supported by a mission, they are more acutely influenced by their bosses. A supervisor has a great deal of influence on the decision making processes of subordinates. This influence is either positive or negative, and most often wielded through role modeling.

> Modeling is an excellent way to teach sound business ethics. It's no secret that if bosses act in certain ways, employees will follow their leads. CEOs and senior executives must show the way and help create an organizational climate of ethical behavior. (Genfan, 1987, p. 35).

Role modeling could also teach negative lessons:

> As a cultural norm, pleasing the boss has priority over objective problem solving. It is expected; successful people do it; and the only way to effect change is to work within the culture of the organization. This, by abdication, has become its operational system of ethics. (Kelly, 1987, p. 12).

As expected, the focus group of directors considered the responsibilities of a boss when making decisions to a greater extent than did the other two groups. For example, while the initial responses of the entry- and mid-level groups to hypothetical situation two were with regard to the behavior of the staff members, the initial concern of the directors was with what George should do: "As a good manager, you need to make sure you're doing things for the right reason." Specific considerations for a "good manager" were expressed:

> ...to get down to it you feel as a manager that you've really managed this well; you've really tried your hardest; you've given them as much autonomy; you've given them projects. After a point, people get, they just can't give any more to that job, and then you need to sit down and have a serious discussion."

Many nodded in agreement, and one stated: "Sometimes they have grown beyond where they can fit in."

These concerns reflect that the responsibilities of the supervisor are to insure the operational effectiveness of the office while analyzing the needs of the staff, a perspective raised throughout the director's focus group discussion. Similar issues were raised by the entry-level staff, but only *after* their conversation evolved from identifying the problem as lying with the unhappy staff (the "small nucleus"). They then came to see the responsibilities as *shared* with George, and identified the problem as "missed communication:"

> I think, ultimately, they are looking at who has all the decision making authority. If it is, in fact, just that they are offering input, then it is <u>just</u> input and George is saying, 'O.K., thanks a lot. I'll make some decisions.' Or has he led them to believe that they are all in together and they make the decisions together, and that's why they're feeling that he's unresponsive. Again, have to go back to, they need to come together and do some expectations, some goals, set some ground work. It either hasn't been done or somehow [has] deviated...

Although the entry-level participants identified supervisory responsibilities similar to those identified by the directors, they feared that George would not acknowledge his responsibilities in this situation. So, by virtue of their position in the organization, they focused on the problem as having <u>shared</u> responsibilities, so that they could appropriately be part of an intervention. As the discussion continued, an entry-level group member suggested that another person on George's staff could get the entire staff to the "common ground:"

> I guess what I would do is hope that part of what I am doing is helping the office, but that office is helping me out in my own pursuit. And I would have to ask George to look at that. Not only does he have a responsibility to that department because he has made it grow and become something, but he also has a responsibility to these individuals that help him do that and continue to do that. So, what I think I would do is try to violate the way he's been thinking about it for a long time, and not necessarily win him over but get him to start to look at the big picture, reanalyze goals, objectives, visions, whatever you want to call them, and then work at the others for give and take.

As one director stated in regard to countering the poor decision made by the dean in hypothetical case one, it was the president's responsibility to "maintain the integrity of that system." This again reveals that the responsibility of the supervisor is to insure the operational effectiveness of the office. Because of his experience as a director, this participant also understood the dynamics of the hypothetical situation, and the importance of analyzing the needs of the staff:

> One of the biggest problems we have, on our level and below, is that the people don't dare make mistakes...I know that this scenario happens for me a lot with people that work for me. They think they're doing things the way I want them to do it. And I don't know why. My response is you may be right, you may be wrong, but you're the one getting paid to make those judgements and decisions. You're not getting paid to try and second guess me. If they don't work out then we deal with it, but we maintain the integrity of the system. And you've got to feel comfortable making those decisions yourself. If you screw up on one, let's talk about it. Sometimes the students need to see it, because we're wrong. Let's face it, we make some bad decisions sometimes. Students need, if they're going to trust us and work with us, they've to got to see us own up to it.

This director clearly sees that his responsibility to his staff is to support and assist them in making decisions on their own. Nevertheless, he and his colleagues all spoke of how it is more typical for subordinate staff to instead consider what the supervisors want. A moderator's probe during the discussion of hypothetical case one asked the directors to consider the response of the "hypothetical president" upon being told by the dean that the dean's behavior was geared to pleasing the president. This probe initiated the following exchange in the directors group:

> ...It seems to me that if a president and the dean are that disparate in where they're coming at these issues philosophically, that it's a relationship that can't persist over time. That there's got to be differences in respect level or whatever. I frankly would expect to more commonly find the opposite situation where the student affairs professional would have the student affairs perception and the president was responding to outside pressures. I think that's a more computable question to me...I don't compute with the opposite relationship where the president is the student affairs type and the dean is the--

another director interrupts:

> But I think that it's a valid question, in terms of how one makes decisions. If you're looking at that, then ultimately, you've got to be responsible for you own decisions and how you work that out with what you think your boss expects you to do, and their expectations. And maybe, the situation may be reversed, but I certainly see the same dynamic occurring. And I think if the dean is also saying 'I did it because I thought that's what you wanted but I don't agree with it,' then I think the dean's got a problem.

The focus group discussion gave the second director a bit to think about regarding his responsibilities as a supervisor to his staff. He made this statement toward the end of the discussion:

> I think we could probably do, I know I could, do a lot better with my department to do exactly that, to have these kinds of discussions. I mean, we do some of this hypothetical stuff, but not enough of it. Because I think what I've just recently heard from my staff is a little bit of, 'sometimes you make decisions for public relations reasons, because that's what the president wants, not because they're the right reasons.' That says to me that they don't have a clear understanding of what the ethics is

> involved with all this. And indeed we got into a very interesting discussion on whether the lack of honesty implies dishonesty, or whether there's some middle ground in there. And I didn't even realize that that was a debatable issue until I got into the debate with my staff. So, I think there's a lot of work that can be done there.

The Participants Consulted with or Considered the Influence of Others to Assist in Making Decisions

In all three groups, the student affairs professionals mentioned using others to assist in making decisions. This occurred through either active statements, like "I'd gather others together" or with reflective comments, such as "I'd think about what the boss would do."

Staff in all three focus groups stated that they would consult with or consider the influence of others when describing how they would approach a dilemma. Regarding hypothetical case one, the prank suicide, an entry-level person said that if she were dean, she would have first called the director of counseling to talk over a good approach: "I would get some consultation, any would help any decision I made as Dean." Another group member said "I'd call the lawyer, right away." The goal is the same in each of the statements: a desire to get necessary information from a perceived "expert," because of an acknowledgement of not knowing enough to undertake a particular approach.

A director also assessed that the same hypothetical case represented a situation where more information was needed. However, her approach was less specific regarding a need for experts, and focused instead on rectifying the poor decision made: "Instead of removing people, it might [make] sense to bring everybody together and begin to talk about it...They really blew this one." Her suggestion of what should have been done acknowledged that although working in groups can be tedious, in some situations it is absolutely necessary:

> You know that sometimes we get very sick of dealing with things on a committee level, bringing in a lot of people, but...this would have been a good opportunity for the dean and the hall director to bring in a bunch of people, counseling folks, police and safety help people and say 'we've got a situation, give me some feedback, what do we need here?' Because they obviously didn't have the whole solution.

Entry- and mid-level staff spoke a great deal about using others to assist them in real work situations. Some statements were "active," indicating actual consultations. An example from the entry-level group: "When I have a problem making a decision, I always go to the director, and ask him about it." From the mid-level staff: "If it's something that's real important, I'll go talk to somebody who I really trust and hopefully, that will be somebody who can help me out with it" and "I go to [name]...for an opinion from the other side."

A mid-level staff person shared an actual experience of working with a group which made an impact on her:

> One experience I had which I thought was extremely helpful... Several years ago, it was apparent that the epistle we had which was supposed to be the emergency procedure was just not workable. So, it was determined that we needed to do *something*. And sitting in on that meeting was the Residence Life Director...the Police and Safety...and a couple of representatives from the Nursing Staff and Counseling. All of a sudden you realized that what I thought as a nursing staff member...'this was the way it had to go for sure'...The Police and Safety had the legal things to think about and Res Life wasn't willing to let the R.A.s assume this responsibility...and *never* had I entertained these things because there was no need. So that was the first thing that I had done which really pointed out the need to be thinking when working with others. Good experience, I thought. And I had to compromise. And I expected them to do a little too.

This appears to be valuable to this person for two reasons: the perspectives of the others helped improve the emergency response procedures, i.e. the "product." In addition, her interaction with the others, the "process," was personally valuable to her.

In addition to "actively" consulting others to assist in making actual decisions, other statements from the mid- and entry-level staff indicated they would "reflect" on what others would do or suggest. An entry-level person indicated she would reflect on what would be done by the "people around that have been resources for me...really relying on some key boss, some key supervisor, whatever. To be quite honest, I think that there's a lot of safety in numbers." A mid-level person shared a similar perspective:

> Most of my decisions are made based on the people above me, especially at work...I constantly think of their influence. It's usually the people who trained me or go through the staff development, so *their* influence and the way they make decisions play an important role on how I make decisions. So if I see them as a role model, as someone very task-oriented, I probably, in order to like work that way, I'd probably do that.

Another group member picked up on his line of thought:

> This is my first year in [a supervisory] position...and I can already tell that a lot of the decisions I make will come from [my subordinates]...will come from some of their needs and some of their wants...and give them as much ownership into some of that decision making as possible, because it won't work if they don't have some input into the decision making. So, as much as I think they know there are times when the decisions have to be made against some of their views, I think most of the time I think about *them* and *their* needs before I think about what my Boss is going to say. And that's partly because I know my philosophies and my views are real similar to my boss so that we're going to be in sync...[and I] check that out.

Her comments are illustrative for two reasons: she clearly represents the mid-level administrative perspective of the pressures and responsibilities in decision making her position requires; and the *manner* in which she describes her experiences is representative of an ethic of caring. She is quite concerned about the "needs and wants" of the people she supervises, and recognizes that "it won't work" without their input.

This section on additional findings has identified the importance of organizational considerations in the decision making processes of the focus group participants. The reflection on organizational missions and the consideration of the influence of others were articulated as important. Additionally, the groups discussed the organizational responsibilities of supervisors. It was clear in their discussions that the professionals had differing "levels of discovery" according to their organizational placement within the division of student affairs. They addressed the hypothetical situtations in different ways because they viewed the situations from different organizational vantage points. Therefore, when considering the hypothetical situations, and in discussion real situations as well, the entry- and mid-level professionals would define problems in ways that would empower them to have a say in their resolutions.

Entry-level staff would see situations as having "shared" responsibilities, and mid-level staff, by virtue of their experience as both the supervisor and the supervised, would actually try to be in *both* sets of shoes to consider the impact of potential decisions. Directors were moved to consider organizational factors when they questioned the motivation behind the behaviors of their subordinate staff: were they trying to make a wise decision or were they trying to please the director? Through such considerations, the directors would reflect on their responsibilities to the development of their subordinate staff.

This chapter has shown that ethical considerations are a part of the decision making practices of student affairs professionals. Their decision making processes do echo themes from the literature on decision making, and many participants demonstrated an ethic of caring. The focus group discussions fostered dialogue on ethical decision making which can enhance the campus environment. Additionally, organizational considerations enter into decision making processes in many ways which allow ethical considerations to emerge.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The intent of this study was to use focus group discussions as a method for understanding the role of ethics in the decision making processes of student affairs professionals. This study demonstrated that in sharing their own subjective considerations, the student affairs professionals described *ethical* considerations when explaining their decision making processes. Further, the interactive processes provided by the focus group discussions contributed to developing a campus environment which promotes dialogue on ethical decision making. There are a number of additional conclusions which can be drawn from this study.

A facility with "ethical jargon" is not the sole indicator of whether a student affairs professional considers ethics when making decisions. Purposefully, the word *ethical* was not introduced by the moderator during the focus groups, to prevent the ethical myth that "personal ethical perfection is prerequisite to any serious consideration of ethics" from confounding the participants (Canon & Brown, 1985, p. 84). Because participants were not made to feel self-conscious about discussing "ethics," good conversation was facilitated: the interactions were not competitive debates, but rather cooperative discussions. The findings revealed that the utilization of the word "ethical" is only one of *many* indicators that decision making processes include ethical considerations.

Predominantly, the study participants described thoughtful, "vigilant" decision making processes. The participants' focus on applied ethics rather than ethical theories was appropriate, since they are practitioners, not philosophers.

The quality of the relational life of the student affairs professionals within the system greatly influences the decisions they make. The scope includes relationships with supervisors, peers, subordinates, and students. Decisional considerations of the impact on or the response of any and all of these relationships were made in all of the groups. It was apparent that group discussion assists in clarifying the responsibilities of the student affairs professional to the "other."

In normal hierarchies, pleasing the boss is an important organizational activity (Kelly, 1987). But professionals are also obliged to act ethically. This creates the classic conflict between bureaucracy and individual choice. A focus group allows the space and opportunity to reinforce the professional's own voice and set of choices. There was a consistent call in all three focus groups for supervisors to respect subordinate roles and relationships, and to assist subordinates in their development of effective decision making processes.

Additional organizational considerations which were represented in the decision making processes included the extent to which the staff, at all levels, reflected on *missions* as guides to action. The study participants found mission statements to be of greater importance than codes. Through their discussions, it appears that prescriptions for ethical decision making are more useful in individual situations, and missions, roles and responsibilities assist in and support organizational decision making.

It was extremely evident that the departmental mission provided by the Vice President when the division was organized, "A Perspective on Student Affairs," (NASPA, 1987), had a significant impact on the staff. The mission assisted the student affairs staff in valuing the services they provide to students, as well as in appreciating other services that were previously unfamiliar to them. It was inspiring; by adopting the values made explicit in the statement, the student affairs staff members moved toward an ethic of caring.

An unanticipated organizational finding was the manner in which the three groups *varied* in their responses. The different groups responded to the problems differently because they *saw* the problems differently. It appears that the differences of organizational perspective are a result of differences of experience in the profession, represented in organizational position level. The actual procedure of grouping the participants according to job level provided an additional opportunity for the members to examine their group dynamics. The profound awareness of the participants' organizational placement within the division of student affairs underscores the importance of respecting the relationships within the division.

The literature on codes of ethics sharply contrasts with the experiences of the focus group participants. The notion that codes were "enabling devices" towards higher ideals was not identified as the experience of the participants. Further, codes had not been "institutionalized" into the daily life of the participants, nor were codes "transformed into management tools" by the participants. Therefore, the findings from the focus groups do not pattern the conclusions from the literature about the importance of codes.

The design of the research questions provided challenges as well. It was difficult to "categorize" the participants' responses in the analysis of research question two: the relationship of their responses to the prescriptions for ethical decision making in the literature. For example, one participant's response regarding conflicting needs illustrated "underlying dimensions," "an ethic of caring," and "personal principles." The difficulty in codifying the responses was representative of the diversity of decisional considerations utilized by student affairs staff.

Also, it was difficult to identify responses to research question three, the extent to which an ethic of caring is exhibited. The nature of group dialogue precluded direct individual discussion about moral attitudes. An ethic of caring could also be exhibited in *action*; discussion doesn't necessarily provide a forum for caring. Nevertheless, at times throughout the three focus group discussions, participants discussed ethical considerations that appeared to arise from moral attitudes rather than from more traditional moral reasoning.

For the vast majority of the participants, the focus group discussions were perceived as enjoyable, both for content and process. Satisfaction and assurance were experienced by the members due to their participation. Members were stimulated by the discussions, reflected on them over time, and continued discussions as well.

This study describes a process which is easily adaptable to other colleges and universities. Recommendations for further study include the following:

The profession of student affairs has a very high percentage of women staff, particularly at entry to mid-level positions. Two-thirds of the participants in this study are women. This study could be tried with a group of staff which has a more even balance between men and women. The dynamics of the gender balance could be studied.

The participants in this study are white. The pilot study participants represented many staff of color, and it is recommended that this study be tried with a more racially and ethnically diverse staff. Attention to other identity groupings are important as well. It must be noted, however, that information regarding diversity of religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and disabilites are not always apparent, and participants' choices to divulge or not divulge such information must be respected.

The three-level groupings were based on the organizational structure to prevent "intimidation" of participants. This was shown to be an appropriate concern, and is recommended for other institutional studies.

The use of the focus group method provided the opportunity for the student affairs staff to state their perspectives and beliefs *in their own voices*. This point is underscored because this research method can also be seen as an intervention. The dialogues of the participants provided opportunities to support, challenge and appreciate one another, in other words, to value one another. In addition, the dialogues enabled the participants to clarify their own values, and examine their values in relation to their organization and its expressed mission. The "ongoing pursuit of value" is integrity (Srivastva and Cooperrider, 1988, p. xii). Wolfe expands this understanding of integrity by defining it as "a social process of valid communication, mutual accommodation, and synergistic problem solving" (1988, p. 171). Therefore, it appears that the discussions provided "first steps" toward the development of an ethical organization as well as individual integrity.

There is an essential difference between focus group discussion for the purposes of data gathering, and on-going group discussion for the purpose of staff development. This focus group study had "staff development" as an unanticipated result, but the primary goal was always clear. This reseacher believes that both goals are valuable and recommends that research for both be conducted, but that the expressed goal of the moderator be fully articulated and understood in advance of the discussions.

The intended values of inquiry and cooperation were indeed the outcome of the focus group discussions. Participants used the focus group forums to gain input into their decisions, to gather new knowledge, to reflect on their own behavior, and to give and receive support around ethical decision making.

Facilitating this kind of dialogue in the student affairs domain was very successful, and is recommended as the first step in developing a campus environment which promotes dialogue on ethical decision making.

APPENDIX A

MODERATOR'S OUTLINE

--Good morning and welcome.

--Thank you for taking the time to join in our discussion on decision making in student affairs.

--We will be discussing the ways we make decisions in our work situations.

--There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view, even if it differs from what others have said!

--Before we begin, here are the ground rules:

--The information generated from your participation in this study will be used primarily for doctoral research.

--Discussion is tape recorded.

--When the tape is transcribed, there will be no names attached to the comments.

--Please speak up--only one person speak at a time.

--Our session will last about an hour and a half, and we will be taking a formal break.

--The rest rooms are just outside this door, and refreshments are over near the wall. Feel free to leave the table for either of these or if you wish to stretch, but please do so quietly.

--Let's begin. There are name cards in front of you to help me, but also because although you all work here in student affairs, you may not all know each other to the same degree. Let's find out some more about each other by going around the room one at a time. Please introduce yourself, and tell us:

1. What is it that you like the most and like the least about being a student affairs professional?

Purpose: this question underscores the common characteristics of the participants, and shows that they will all have a basis for sharing information.

2. Hypothetical situation #1: interactions with students.

On the first anniversary of the suicide of a student who leaped from the ninth story of a high-rise residence hall, a group of students dangles a dummy from an upper floor of the same hall and then allows it to fall to a roof below after it has attracted the attention of other students. Medical rescue personnel who are called to the scene discover the "prank." The hall director and the dean of students are so incensed by the students' callous behavior that they resolve to identify and punish those responsible before the evening is over. Students residing on the floor from which the dummy was dropped are

> called in and interviewed one by one. While no direct accusations are made, it becomes clear that three students are likely to be the culprits. The three are called in individually. Each is told that he or she has been reliably identified, and each is given an opportunity to confess, leave the hall the next day, and be placed on probation. The students are also advised that the alternative to a confession is a judicial office hearing with expulsion from the university as the probable result. They confess. The dean and hall director are fully aware that there is insufficient evidence for a judicial hearing. (Canon, 1985, p. 7).

Do you see anything noteworthy here about the behavior of the dean and hall director?

probes:

--as dean, what would you have done?

--if you were president and received this report, what would you do?

--if the dean's response to the president is "I did what I thought you wanted me to do!", what would you do?

Purpose: this question will provide the opportunity to discuss with the rest of the group the same problem. This question is directly related to research question #1, "do ethical considerations enter into the decision making processes utilized by student affairs professionals?"; research question #2, "how do actual decision making processes as described by the student affairs professionals relate to prescriptions for ethical decision making in the literature?"; research question #3, "to what extent is an ethic of caring exhibited?"; and research question #4, "does the focus group forum itself contribute to developing a campus environment which promotes dialogue on ethical decision making?"

2. Hypothetical situation #2: supervisory relationships.

George has established a reputation as an innovator in placement and has built his campus agency into a model of what a developmentally focused agency can accomplish with both students and prospective employers. Before George assumed the director's position, the placement office was quite traditional in focus and only marginally effective. George has recruited a bright, creative, and energetic young professional staff over the past three years. A small nucleus of this group of career counselors has begun to challenge George on issues related to program focus, and its members are pressing hard for more time to pursue their particular interests. George has resisted some of their suggestions, because he judges that they could have the effect of scattering staff and fiscal resources and thus of undercutting programs that are currently very effective. Having lost the battle in staff meetings, the dissident group loses little time in proclaiming their discontent and dissatisfaction to peers at other institutions and in sharing their judgement that George is rigid and unresponsive to staff input.
(Canon, p. 12, 1985).

What are the issues involved in this situation?

probes:

--how would you approach this problem?

--as George?

--as one in the small nucleus?

--as a new staff member not involved?

--as a peer at another institution?

Purpose: this question will provide the opportunity to discuss with the rest of the group the same problem. This question is directly related to research question #1, "do ethical considerations enter into the decision making processes utilized by student affairs professionals?"; research question #2, "how do actual decision making processes as described by the *student affairs professionals relate to prescriptions for ethical decision making in the literature?"; research question #3, "to what extent is an ethic of caring exhibited?"; and research question #4, "does the focus group forum itself contribute to developing a campus environment which promotes dialogue on ethical decision making?"*

4. Are there real situations which raise issues similar to those articulated in the hypothetical discussions which you would be willing to discuss? Could you explain the process you undertook in addressing the conflict, and why you did what you did?

   probes:

   --were other people contacted?

   --was there a conflict between the needs of the individual and the needs of the institution?

Purpose: this question will provide the opportunity to identify prescriptions for ethical decision making, and therefore addresses research question #2. If there is an identification on the part of the participants of a conflict between individual and institution, issues related to research question #3, "to what extent is an ethic of caring exhibited?" are raised.

5. Have you ever consulted a professional code (NASPA, for example) for assistance in deciding how to approach a problem?

   probes:

   --why? why not?

   --what were you looking for?

--what else would you consult?

--who else would you consult?

Purpose: this question will provide the opportunity to identify prescriptions for ethical decision making, and therefore addresses research question #2. Research question #3, "to what extent is an ethic of caring exhibited?" may be identified if the response to the question is negative.

6. Has this discussion been valuable to you?

probes:

--please explain why or why not.

--is this something you've done before? How often?

--has discussing this <u>as a staff</u> been valuable?

Purpose: this question will provide the opportunity to specifically address research question #4, "does the focus group forum itself contribute to developing a campus environment which promotes dialogue on ethical decision making?"

APPENDIX B

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

September 25, 1989

Memorandum to:	Focus Group Participants, University of Southern Maine
Memorandum from:	Mary Ellen Sailer, Doctoral Candidate, University of Massachusetts
Subject:	Follow-up Questions on Focus Group Discussion

Thank you again for having participated in our focus group discussion last month on decision making in student affairs. I would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to answer this brief questionnaire. Basically, I'm interested in what (if any) impact the discussion had on you and your decision making processes. Please attach additional sheets of paper if necessary. Identifying yourself is not required, but would be welcome. I have enclosed a self-addressed stamped envelope for your use in returning this to me. Thank you very much.

1. In reflecting on the group discussion we had last month, had the discussion been of value to you? Please explain why or why not.

2. Had the fact that you participated as a staff been of value? Please elaborate.

3. Have you utilized any type of group discussion to facilitate decision making in the past month? Is your answer attributed to the group discussion we had last month?

4. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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